

THE ARGOSY.

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THE MISSING RUBIES.

BY SARAH DOUDNEY.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AFTER "LIFE'S FITFUL FEVER."

IT wanted still some minutes to nine, when Vordenberg entered the shop in Wardour Street on Monday morning.

The bright morning light was pouring down on the dim street; cabs were rattling cheerfully along, sight-seers were gazing at the queer old things in the shop-windows. Gregg's door opened as usual to admit the early caller, and Gregg himself, looking half asleep, wished him good-morning as he passed through the shop.

The worthy couple had not returned from their country trip till past midnight. Country friends are proverbially hospitable, and they had come home in such a bemused condition that it was wonderful how they had contrived to find their way to bed. The foreign gentlemen upstairs had not yet rung for breakfast; and Mrs. Gregg, almost stupefied with headache, was just beginning to set about her morning work.

Instead of pausing in the shop, Vordenberg went upstairs to look round the room in which that terrible scene had been enacted last night. Some letter might probably have been left for him there. The door was shut. He turned the handle, and went in.

The first thing that seemed strange was that the paraffin lamp had not been extinguished, but was still burning with a steady, strong light. The blinds were still down, but the bright day came shining in, and there was something weird in this mingling of lights. A rapid glance round the room showed Vordenberg that one of the Poles had not kept his promise to depart. Stavieski was lying at full length on the sofa-bed, fast asleep.

Fast asleep! His friend's entrance was unheard. There was no movement, no sound of long-drawn breath, nothing but the most absolute stillness and repose. His features were always wasted and pale—poor Michael—but now, seen in that strong light, the face

looked like a fine copy of Michael's face, carved in ivory, without a wrinkle to mar its outlines. Vordenberg stopped short, and his heart gave a warning throb.

Going up close to that motionless figure, he laid his hand upon the breast. Michael was asleep indeed. After "life's fitful fever" there had come to him the boon of eternal rest.

As Vordenberg stood there beside his dead friend, he remembered that his last words to Michael had been angry words. And he recalled that parting look that Michael had given him and Paulina as they were leaving the room. It had been a look of sorrow and remorse. The better nature of the man had struggled through that burning desire for revenge which had withered up all that was good in his life. At the last, just at the very last, there had been granted to Stavieski a little time of repentance and regret.

As Vordenberg stood there, looking down quietly at the still face, he seemed to see a long procession of the friends of his youth passing by. His father came first, a shadowy figure whose features were faint and indistinct. Then came the Count Lorenski, gallant and strong, with head erect, and dauntless eyes, as if he were leading on a regiment of heroes to die for Poland. Then old Wouriski, venerable and feeble, his fur cap covering his grey hairs. Then Paul Stavieski, young, stalwart, handsome, with a proud glance and a firm step. Others followed; but Vordenberg could bear no more. He covered his eyes as if to shut out the sight of that spectral company, and groaned aloud in bitterness of heart.

Conquering himself at last, he bethought him of all that now remained to be done. A sealed letter, with his name on the cover, was lying on the table near the lamp. He opened and read it.

In a few words, written in his own language, John Wouriski described the manner of his companion's death :

After Vordenberg had left the room, he spoke but little, and seemed disinclined to begin the preparations for departure. Wouriski had urged him to make haste; but he did not care to move, and once he had murmured something about going on a longer journey than they had ever taken yet. Then suddenly, in a loud voice, he called his friend to his side, looked at him, pressed his hand, and sank back heavily on the sofa. Wouriski put some cordial to his lips; but all in vain. He never spoke again. The heart disease, under which he had laboured for years, had opened the doors of life's dreary prison, and set the captive free.

Two persons were pacing slowly up and down, under the great trees in the meadow in front of Ham House.

The fine old place was asleep in the sunshine and shadows of that golden afternoon. Through the trees gleamed the silver line of the river. From the silent old gardens came the scent of full-blown roses and honey-suckle, overpoweringly sweet; the ancient bricks

were hung with moss velvet, and heaped with ivy. In the centre of the lawn the grey river-god seemed to bask in the sunlight; the mullioned windows glittered, and the walls took a warmer red as the sun got low. From some such palace as this, the Sleeping Beauty must have come forth at her happy waking, and made her way through sweet tumbled grasses, and showers of falling blossoms—

“To that new world which is the old.”

Beatrice was not afraid to enjoy her happiness now. She could walk silently beside Godwin, too joyous to talk much, with peace shining in her deep eyes.

How bewildering was the beauty of that place on a summer day! Silence, perfumes, beautiful green shadows, flashes of bright water, merry voices, mellowed by distance; all was like the realisation of some old dream of bliss!

Most girls have such dreams. Some never realise them at all. Others take late in life the joy that was denied to their early youth. These last are blessed; they accept their bliss with a calm heart and a thankful spirit. But still more blessed are those who enter their earthly Paradise with feet that have never been wearied with the long road, and souls that have been undarkened by the shadows of disappointment and regret. To Beatrice, in the bloom of her young womanhood, fate was kind.

She looked down on the daisies at her feet, and then up to the face by her side. Its expression was more tranquil than she had ever seen it before. Godwin could love now in happiness as well as in sorrow. He had the means of clearing his name. He could look the whole world in the face without the dread of a taunt or a sneer.

As he met the tender gaze of those blue eyes, he felt that she might read his heart. He was thinking of the great blessing of her true love, and the new life it had brought to him.

“My darling,” he said, suddenly, “from the very first moment of our meeting, you became my good angel! What have I ever done to deserve you? Hundreds of better men long all their lives for such a gift as is bestowed upon me.”

“Don’t praise me too much,” she answered, with a blush and smile. “Remember how many faults there are in me. Think of my impetuous, unconventional conduct at Fairbridge! I believe I should have died if I had stayed there; but of course I ought to have stayed.”

“I can’t think that you ought to have stayed. If it had not been for your ‘impetuous conduct,’ dear, I might never have found out the mystery of the necklace. It was one of your impulses which sent you to Vordenberg, and prompted you to open your heart to him.”

“Yes, but I don’t mean always to be guided by my impulses. When—when——”

"When you are married, child? Go on."

"It is not easy to go on, when one is ruthlessly interrupted," said Beatrice, with dignity. "When I am a matron, Godwin, I intend to be a quiet, self-restrained person. Just now you were saying something about a good angel. Don't you think that it is Mr. Vordenberg who deserves that name? We can never repay all that he has done for us."

"He is a wonderful man," replied Godwin, thoughtfully. "You know I have decided to leave the task of proving my innocence entirely in his hands. He asked this of me."

"You are right, quite right to let him do it in his own way," Beatrice spoke earnestly. "Depend upon it that anything he undertakes will be thoroughly done. What strange powers he has! And yet, although we all feel that there is something mysterious about him, we are never afraid to trust him."

"He is the best of friends," said Godwin, warmly. "As good a friend as Bassanio was to that poor devil of an Antonio. There is a shock in store for the Countess Gradizoff! If she only knew what was coming, I believe she would fly the country!"

"Aunt Jane will venture to love her boy again," said Beatrice, with a smile, remembering the sweet old woman. "I wonder if Aunt Dorothy will ever look on me graciously in time to come? You see, I shall never more appear in Fairbridge in the character of Mr. Redburn's adopted daughter. Miss Earle's favour was bestowed on the heiress, not on poor Beatrice Ward. But I think Aunt Jane liked me for my own sake."

"They will all like you for your own sake, by-and-bye. My uncle Charles is a just man, and when certain proofs are laid before him, he will act fairly. I have not, I confess, any strong affection for Uncle Charles, but I can rely on his sense of right. As to old Redburn's fortune, dear, we can do without it. Mr. Corder has plainly declared his intention of putting me in the place of his lost son."

Beatrice looked away to the old house, standing in the midst of fragrant shade and slowly-changing sunlight. She wanted to be quite certain that everything was real—these stately trees with their wealth of shadow and foliage—these afternoon glories filling up every space. Her eyes came back to her lover, happy, half-bewildered, wholly satisfied.

"Oh, how good everyone is to us!" said she, clasping her hands, with a pretty, childish gesture. "I am so glad, Godwin, that our money is not to come through me. Now it will be for you to bestow, and for me to receive. I never liked the idea of being an heiress while you were a poor man. Everything is going to be as it ought to be. And I am wicked enough to feel that I shall enjoy Mr. Redburn's discomfiture. Nothing will punish him more than to know that we really have no need of him."

They began to walk slowly back through the meadows to the river-

side, where the Miltons and Mr. Corder were awaiting them. Beatrice watched the river with a fixed, dreamy gaze, scarcely seeing the gay little boats that darted along, scarcely heeding the chance lights flashing on its tide. Foreboding clouds were far away; the world was full of happy promises. Godwin was hers, and she was his. Nothing could ever part them again.

When they reached the elder people, the girl stole up to Mr. Corder's side, and drew him gently away from the rest.

"If Godwin is to be your son," she said, "you will let me be your daughter, will you not? I will try to be all that you wish. I am not always proud and wayward as I was with Mr. Redburn. And I do want you to feel that I really love you."

The old man, who had had so many losses, looked into that fresh face, and felt that life had something in store for him yet.

"My dear," he answered, "I have already given you a daughter's place in my heart, and I thank God for your love. You and Godwin are sent to brighten the last years of a lonely man. We shall spend many happy days together, I believe, before I am called away. It is my wish that you shall be married very soon. But you must settle that with Godwin."

"What is that which she must settle with me?" asked Earle, coming up with a brightness that was new in him. "I think I can guess. Do you know, Beatrice, that Mr. Corder has already found a house that he says will suit us very well. You must take house-keeping lessons of Mrs. Milton without delay."

"She shall begin to-morrow," declared Harriet, firmly. "Her weak point is—dinner! She must learn to order things, and take an interest in the cookery-book."

"And she must acquire all the necessary knowledge as quickly as possible," said Mr. Corder, with a smile. "It will not take long to get the house ready."

"You frighten me," said Beatrice, running off to Richard Milton. And putting her hand within his arm, she asked in a whisper whether he were very anxious to send her away?

His answer dimmed the blue eyes for a moment with happy tears. And then, a straggling party, they all walked down-hill to the railway station, in the evening glow of that lovely day.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AT MEADOW HOUSE.

ONE morning, when Meadow House and its grounds were bathed in the sunny calm of early day, Aunt Dorothy came out of her sleeping-room with a disturbed face.

She paused as she passed a corridor window, thickly framed in ivy,

and looked down into the garden with thoughtful eyes. Two ring-doves, perched on the grey sun-dial, were pecking grain out of Olga's hand. A great mass of white roses took the first freshness of the morning light; scarlet geraniums burned with a splendid glow in the shadows. Miss Earle loved the place better, perhaps, than she loved anything else on earth—loved every inch of that velvet sward, every brick in that ivy-grown wall that guarded her paradise from the outer world. In winter or summer she delighted in the view which she saw from that ivy-window, but to-day she could not look upon it with an untroubled gaze. Her peace had been ruffled by a letter.

Her conscience told her that this letter, which she was holding in her hand, ought to be a welcome thing. And she was glad, yes, she was honestly glad that her dead brother's only son was doing well in the world, and was able to clear his name. But the story of the necklace was an old story now, and she had hoped that the matter was buried and forgotten.

They had all done their best. Caroline's loss had been made good by the two sisters and their brother Charles. It had been neither pleasant nor easy to part with the money, but they had acted as they thought right, and Caroline had been satisfied. Time had subdued the bitterness which the disappearance of the necklace had caused. And although the Countess sometimes referred a little sentimentally to her husband's parting gift, she had ceased to bewail its loss.

And now the old affair was to be raked up again. The calm of life would be broken into by a solemn family gathering. Family gatherings often mean family rows. The Countess Gradizoff was matchless in a family row, and always got the best of everybody. Dorothy Earle was inwardly convinced that Caroline would be very terrible on the coming occasion.

"And I have got to tell Jane all about it," she thought, sighing. "And Jane is so nervous and excitable that this matter will make her really ill. She has not been quite herself since Miss Ward left the Lindricks in that extraordinary way. Dear me, it is all very bewildering and disagreeable!"

The sun was shining into the pretty old dining-room, lighting up its walls of panelled oak, and glittering on the silver and glass on the breakfast-table. A bowl of freshly-gathered roses sent out their perfume to greet Dorothy as she entered. Outside on the terrace was Jane, busy as usual with her beloved flowers.

Dorothy settled her mob-cap, which was not in the least awry, cleared her voice with a preparatory "Hem," and stepped slowly out of the open window to join her sister.

Jane was lingering over her large myrtle bush in a quiet ecstasy. She was in charity with the whole world. All her plants were flourishing. She was happy, and quite absorbed, just then, in her simple life. Later on, perhaps, when they were all sitting in the old drawing-room, and the sweet dusk was creeping round them, she would feel

a faint pang of remembrance. She had had many such pangs since that last talk with Beatrice on the ivy-grown bridge.

"What a morning, Dorothy!" she said, cheerfully, looking away down the long garden, with its glowing colours, and sweet, tremulous lights and shadows.

"Beautiful," replied the elder sister absently. "Jane, I want you to read these letters. But first I think I had better prepare your mind for their contents."

"Is there anything very dreadful in them?" asked poor Jane anxiously. "It does seem hard that any bad news should come on such a lovely day as this!"

"Nothing dreadful, of course. Dear me, Jane, I wish you would try to conquer your nervousness. You are not equal to the slightest shock, I see! Now do give me your attention, and be calm; I want you to understand everything before Caroline comes downstairs."

"I am listening, Dorothy," Jane answered meekly.

"The first letter is from Charles, and he encloses one which he has received from Godwin. It appears that Godwin is now able to clear himself from the suspicion that has been attached to him so long. The ruby necklace is found. Godwin desires us to appoint a day for a family meeting at this house; and Charles writes to say that Monday will suit him very well. But that is not all; it seems that Mr. Corder has adopted Godwin as a son, and he will be a rich man. How incredible it is!"

"But this is very good news," said Jane, with a tearful joy that made her look young again. "I thought from your face that it was bad."

"I cannot look at it as unmixed good. You do not realise the unpleasant scene that we shall have at this family meeting. I wish Godwin would just send back the necklace, and leave us to take his innocence for granted. But Charles does not seem to see it in that light. He says that the boy ought to have a fair hearing."

"Of course that is right," Jane ventured to say.

"It is right. But Charles does not live with Caroline, and we do. When Caroline gets excited the whole household is disquieted for weeks. Sweet peace—how one longs to preserve it!"

There was a dim notion floating through Jane's brain that peace ought not to be preserved at the expense of justice. But she had never been able to put her ideas readily into the form of words.

"Godwin wishes Mr. Redburn and Colonel Lindrick to be present at his vindication," Dorothy continued. "Charles has written to Colonel Lindrick, and fixed Monday for the meeting. I wish it were all over! What *will* Caroline say?"

"Why need we tell her directly?" said Jane, brightening at her own suggestion. "Why need we all be made uncomfortable till next Monday comes? To-day is only Wednesday. Let us wait until Sunday before we say anything to Caroline."

"Oh, that will not do. She ought to be told, of course."

"Then she will give us no rest till the day comes," sighed Jane, dismally.

"Well, we will see how she is this morning," said Dorothy, after a pause. "If she has one of her headaches it may be best, perhaps, to put off telling her for a little while. Here comes Olga; not a word in her hearing! I am going to ring for prayers."

The four maid-servants came in, and seated themselves demurely in a row at the end of the long room. Olga entered, and stationed herself next to Jane. Miss Earle opened her book, and then glanced expectantly towards the door. But Caroline did not appear.

Then Aunt Dorothy began to drone through the prayers, not without making several most unwonted blunders, which set poor Jane a-trembling on her knees and astonished Olga. The bees were droning, too, outside the window; the doves had fluttered softly down to the terrace, and were cooing an accompaniment to the old lady's monotonous voice. Even the religious exercises at Meadow House were of a drowsy kind. The Earles took care of their souls in a placid, decorous fashion that never changed with the changes of the times.

There was a soft rustle as they all rose from their knees. Olga approached Miss Earle, and saluted her waxen cheek with the usual morning kiss. "Mamma is not well this morning, Aunt Dorothy," she said. "Will you kindly send her breakfast upstairs? She really is not able to come down yet."

"I thought she looked as if she were going to have a headache last night," observed Jane, trying to repress an unsisterly thrill of joy. "Her eyes were so heavy. Did you not notice them, Dorothy?"

"I don't think I did," Miss Earle replied. "We will send up the tray at once. If your mother has many more of these attacks, Olga, I shall advise her to consult Doctor Bendall."

"She ought to see him," answered Olga rather carelessly. "Aunt Jane, I wish you would take me with you to Fairbridge this morning."

"No, Olga," Dorothy interposed. "You have neglected your piano lately. Spend an hour in practising. And then there are your other studies."

Miss Gradizoff's backwardness in acquiring accomplishments was a trouble to her aunts. They were fond of their niece, but she was more stupid and less good-looking than she ought to have been. From the Count, her father, she had inherited a Tartar cast of feature which the Earles could not admire. They were rather proud of their own beautiful old chiselled noses and dove-like eyes; and Olga was not like them in the least. It was a pity, as they used to say to each other.

The girl went off obediently to her tasks, without showing any temper. Left to themselves, the sisters exchanged a meaning glance. Dorothy stood, resting one thin white hand on the back of a chair.

"I can't possibly tell her anything to-day," she said at last. "These headaches are becoming very frequent, and they always leave her exhausted. Lately I have thought Caroline looking a good deal older."

"She does look older," Jane replied. "She will not wear as well as you and I have done. Poor Godwin—how proud he used to be of our appearance, Dorothy!"

"I really believe the boy admired us," admitted Miss Earle, not ill-pleased. "How extraordinary that Mr. Corder should have taken such a fancy to him! We never dreamt of such a thing. I suppose he will marry Miss Ward without much delay. But if all this could have been foreseen, he might have married Alma after all."

"I fancy he will be happier with Beatrice Ward," Jane said, musingly. "She is very young, and rather undisciplined, perhaps; but she is a girl that the Earles cannot possibly be ashamed of. And such beauty, you know! Quite an uncommon style."

"Charles will be charmed with her," Dorothy remarked. "If Godwin's name is really cleared, Mr. Redburn is sure to take the pair into favour. I was always very sorry, Jane, that the Lindricks knew anything about the necklace. We meant, of course, to keep the matter entirely to ourselves. But Olga babbled; one cannot trust that girl with the smallest secret!"

"It was not nice in Colonel Lindrick to set Mr. Redburn against the poor boy," Jane said, with unusual warmth. "Charles is evidently displeased about it. You see, Godwin has told Charles everything; and Mr. Corder must have written too."

"Yes, Charles speaks of having had a letter from Mr. Corder," rejoined Dorothy, thoughtfully. "It seems that there will be quite a long story to tell, and a great deal of evidence to bring forward. I am feeling rather unsettled, Jane. On the whole, I am glad we have decided not to say anything to Caroline just yet."

"She is really too ill to be excited, Dorothy. It would be most unwise to broach the subject at present. You will write to Charles to-day?"

"Yes; before Caroline comes downstairs. Of course I shall tell him that we are quite willing for the meeting to take place here on Monday. But, as I said just now, I shall be glad when it is over."

"It may not be as bad as we fear," said Jane, consolingly, as she went off to dress for her walk.

As Jane Earle took her way across the sunshiny meadows, keeping under the shade of the trees, she pondered over all the wonderful things that had happened this summer. In spite of her dread of Caroline, and all that she might do and say, there was happiness in her heart this morning.

Jane had kept her knowledge of Godwin's engagement locked up in her own bosom, till Beatrice's flight startled her into making a revelation. The part that the Lindricks had played had displeased

Dorothy as well as Jane. She thought it unfriendly in the Colonel to disclose a painful family matter to a stranger like Mr. Redburn. Ever since Miss Ward's hasty departure there had been a decided coolness between Meadow House and Oak Lodge. Even Alma, with all her tact, could not succeed in getting back to her old footing with the Earles.

The Countess Gradizoff had never been told why Beatrice had hurried away from the Lindricks' house. Her sisters always avoided making any references to Godwin in her hearing. And as Alma had never been very intimate with Caroline, no confidences were exchanged between them.

CHAPTER XXX.

ALMA LINDRICK.

WHEN Jane was walking through the sunny old High-street of Fair bridge, one of the first acquaintances she met was Alma Lindrick, who came up, smiling, to greet her.

They met close to the old Gothic portal of the church; a low arched door, richly decked with ivy. Some shrill notes sung by melancholy boyish voices came drifting out into the street.

Alma was looking troubled and worn. She wore a delicate, cream-coloured gown, and her thin face was shaded by a broad hat with a pale-blue satin lining. Some years ago she might have looked fresh and pretty in such a costume, but to-day her dress seemed to make her prematurely faded and old. Jane was touched by her aspect, and spoke more cordially than usual.

"Papa has had a letter from Canon Earle," said Alma, after a few words about commonplace things. "It has surprised him very much. I suppose you know all about it?"

"Yes," Jane replied. "We heard from our brother this morning. Does Mr. Redburn mean to attend the meeting at our house on Monday?"

"He can hardly refuse to come. He, too, has had a note from the Canon. It seems to be quite a sensational affair; a great many disclosures are promised. Very odd, is it not?"

"It is unexpected," said Jane. "But, of course, we are very glad that the mystery is about to be cleared up."

"And the Countess—what does she say?"

"She is ill," answered Jane, gravely. "We have not told her anything yet. Her headaches are very severe, and her nerves are in an irritable state. I don't think it will be wise to mention the matter to her till Monday comes. We are quite concerned about her health."

"Certainly the Countess has not been looking well, lately. Dear Miss Jane, I think the world is full of invalids! Poor Beatrice Ward was ill after she left us so suddenly."

"Poor child; she had enough to make her ill," said Jane, warmly. "I suppose she will soon be married, now that Godwin is a rich man."

"Is he, indeed, a rich man?" Alma asked.

She spoke in a composed tone; but her face had perceptibly paled.

"Yes," Jane responded. "Mr. Corder—a very wealthy merchant—has taken him into partnership. I can't imagine Godwin having anything to do with trade; he is the first of the Earles who ever did. But everybody seems to go into business nowadays."

The two women parted, and as Alma walked away down the sunshiny street her heart was heavy within her. How differently she would have acted, if she could but have foreseen this change in Godwin's circumstances!

She felt sick and weary of everything that day. The air was full of sweet scents; tall white lilies were abloom in the prim little gardens in front of the old houses; the sleepy town was so still and bright that it seemed as if no change could ever come to such a tranquil, old-fashioned place.

She went on to the ivied bridge that spanned the river, and looked idly down at the green stems and leaves that were swaying with the ripple of its waters. The stream flashed merrily in the sunshine, singing its glad song. Godwin had liked this spot. He would bring his wife here some day. Perhaps his children would come and sail their toy-boats on this sparkling tide. The old house would be his; all the good things that had seemed withheld for ever would be freely poured at his feet.

Beatrice, in her simplicity, had been wiser than Alma, with her worldly wisdom. It sometimes happens that the romantic fool wins a prize that policy and discretion have missed. If Alma had had a little patience—if she had only been true a little longer to her old lover, she would have got the very things for which her soul had always pined.

Canon Earle's letters had spoiled all the Lindricks' plans, and filled them with confusion and dismay.

"By George, Lindrick," old Redburn had said to the Colonel, "it seems that you misled me about young Earle. He is prepared to prove his innocence—do you understand that? Confound it altogether, you have made me look like a fool!"

"This may be merely a piece of swagger," the Colonel had replied. "If his innocence could be proved, why wasn't it done sooner?"

But although he spoke coolly, Colonel Lindrick was ill at ease. Matters had taken an unexpected turn. His reputation for sagacity, which he had built up so carefully, was about to be shivered to atoms.

Old Redburn was a man who opened his purse-strings readily for

those whom he liked. And he had really felt a sincere liking for Lindrick, and had lent him money with no grudging spirit. But he was already beginning to regret his behaviour to Beatrice's lover; and if Godwin really came out of all his troubles with flying colours, old Redburn would be the first to acknowledge his mistake. Captain Ward's daughter was sure to be taken back to her place in his affections, and Alma's chance would be lost.

When Alma came home, tired and dispirited, from her walk, she found the old man sitting on the lawn in the sunshine. It was one of his good days, when his cough troubled him but little, and his aches and pains gave him a brief rest.

"You are looking fagged," he said, as Alma came to his side. "What a mistake your father has made about young Earle! Filled my mind with stories about him, so that I went up to town and asked him how he dared to propose to poor Ward's child. Wish I hadn't listened to a word of all those nonsensical tales."

"It was not papa's fault that you went up to town, Mr. Redburn," replied Alma, with a dignity that did her credit. "If he had known that you were going, he would have tried to keep you back. As to the suspicion that had clung to Godwin Earle, it was made known to us by his own relations. They were bitter enough against him once; but now that he is a rich man they will believe anything in his favour."

"Who says he is a rich man? That's another new tale."

"Miss Jane Earle says so. I met her this morning. She told me that Godwin had been taken into partnership by a wealthy merchant in London."

Mr. Redburn's face lengthened.

"Then the little puss will marry him without more ado!" he said, stroking his chin with a crestfallen air. "My Lady Beatrice will not want anything from me."

"Nothing," said Alma, briefly.

"She would not care to receive anything if I offered it?"

"I don't think she would. In fact I am sure she will never forgive you for coming between her and Godwin. I never saw any girl as much in love as she is. She is perfectly infatuated about that man."

"A poor melancholy-looking beggar!" Mr. Redburn said, with some spite.

"In her eyes he is a sort of demi-god. Nothing on earth will ever change her opinion of him."

"And nothing on earth will ever make me like him!" burst out the old man in a sudden fury of jealousy. "I owe them both some reparation, perhaps. I ought not to have said such things as I did say. Of course he will turn out to be not as black as he has been painted, and I shall have, in common decency, to make a sort of apology."

"It won't be difficult to do that," said Alma, soothingly. "There

will be a little scene—I think there's something stagey about the whole business—and then it will be all over. Beatrice will get married, and exist only for her husband. She will always hate you a little, I think, but she will be so fully occupied with loving, that she won't have time to hate anybody much."

"She is a fool," remarked old Redburn, courteously.

"I always thought so. But I think she is likely to be a happy fool. Don't you ever feel that it would be wise to forget her?"

"A little ungrateful noodle," he muttered, still fuming. "You have fifty times more sense than she has. And you have behaved very well to me, Alma—very well indeed."

"I like to behave well to you," responded Alma, sweetly. "I am not the kind of woman, you see, to fall over head and ears in love with any young man. It is not in me to be rapturous and devoted, and all that sort of thing. I never was romantic when I was a girl. And so I have some feeling to bestow on my friends, because I don't lavish it all on one person."

"I wish you had been poor Ward's daughter, instead of Beatrice ! Upon my soul I do !"

Alma was discreetly silent, but her heart was beating very fast. The garden seemed to be asleep in the summer sunshine. Not a living soul was to be seen, and only the song of birds filled up this momentous pause.

"There's a decent lawyer fellow at Fairbridge, isn't there ?" he asked, abruptly.

"Oh, yes." The tone was quite composed. "Our own lawyer, Mr. Graine, lives there."

"Well, I should like him to be sent for. And now, I think I've been sitting out here long enough. It's turning chilly, I fancy. One can't depend on this climate an hour. Where is Blake ? Why the deuce does he always get out of the way when he's wanted ?"

"He isn't far off. I will call him."

Beatrice herself could scarcely have gone springing towards the house with a lighter step. Miss Lindrick's eyes were so bright and her cheeks so flushed that the man-servant noticed the change in her. He hurried across the lawn to his master, and she hastened indoors to her father.

A few minutes later the Colonel, in his dog-cart, was spinning along the road to Fairbridge.

Alma, standing at the window of her own room, watched him till the trees hid him from her sight, and then sank down into an easy chair to rest and think.

"It will all be mine soon ; I am sure it will !" she mused. "Dr. Bendall feels persuaded that he won't last through the winter. If I am certain of his intentions, I shall think no more about the Barnicott match. It never was quite good enough."

She sat and dreamed about her future wealth, building all sorts of

magnificent castles in the air. And yet, splendid as those castles were, every one of them was as cold and empty as the palace of the Snow-Queen in the fairy tale.

She had ceased to want Godwin Earle back again ; but she had never found anyone to put in his vacant place. Her love had not been worth having ; it was a poor chilly thing at its best ; but such as it was he had possessed it all. All her days, Alma knew that she should be always a little bored, a little dreary, just because she had never realised the dream of her youth.

Nevertheless, she was in excellent spirits when she went downstairs to meet her father and Mr. Graine. The lawyer stayed to luncheon, and went upstairs afterwards to receive old Redburn's instructions in his own room.

"He is very feeble—very feeble indeed, Miss Lindrick," said Graine, as he stood in the hall, waiting for the dog-cart to be brought round again to the door.

"Yes," replied Alma, with a gentle little shake of the head. "We are doing all we can, but we can't hope he will get stronger. It will be a sad summer to us, I am afraid."

"Ah, you mustn't look only on the dark side," said the lawyer, with a certain meaning in his tone that Alma caught at once. "You have a great many bright summers to look forward to. Good day, Miss Lindrick."

The Colonel drew his daughter into the library, and walked up and down with a radiant face.

"We have done a good day's work," he said. "You have managed things very cleverly, Alma. We shall have nothing to fear now from the results of this ridiculous meeting. By the way, do you mean to come and hear Earle's vindication?"

"I think I will," she answered, after a moment's thought. "It is as well to be as much as possible with Mr. Redburn. And I should really like to hear Godwin's explanation of this wonderful mystery!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

REVELATIONS.

As the week went on, Dorothy Earle grew more and more afraid of announcing the family meeting to Caroline.

The Countess Gradizoff was not exactly ill ; but she was certainly growing thinner and older. The calm stagnant atmosphere that had preserved her old sisters in more than ordinary freshness, seemed to waste and wear the younger woman. Caroline was perfectly aware that Meadow House did not agree with her, but she was firmly determined to stay in it as long as she possibly could.

She was always civil to Dorothy. It was only to the unoffending Jane that she ever allowed her temper to show itself. Caroline was

a woman who could not live without a victim. But even with Jane she did not venture to go too far, because Miss Earle would sometimes come unexpectedly to the aid of her gentle sister.

Sunday came round, and nothing had been said about the terrible event of the morrow. All through church-time the two Miss Earles worried themselves with the fear that Miss Lindrick would say something to Caroline. But Alma, sitting alone in her pew, was entirely occupied with her own thoughts. Her father had stayed at home with Mr. Redburn, so that there was nothing to be dreaded from him. She did not join the Earles' party as they were leaving the church, and they went home congratulating themselves on an escape.

"She *must* be told to-day," said Dorothy, walking nervously into Jane's room, with her bonnet still upon her head. "They will all be here at eleven to-morrow; only think of it! I expect Charles will be here earlier. He will want to have a few words with us first."

"He is sure to come earlier. When Charles really is roused to exert himself, he does a great deal. Do you know, Dorothy, I think he is the right person to tell Caroline what is going to happen."

"Oh," said Miss Earle, much impressed.

"Yes," continued Jane, quite proud of her idea. "The letters went to him. Caroline was the loser of the necklace; it is clear, therefore, that he, as the head of the family, ought to speak to Caroline on such a serious matter. I wonder that we did not think of this sooner. It would have spared us a great deal of perplexity."

Miss Earle stood quite still, smoothing her dove-coloured satin bonnet-strings. A half-hoop of large diamonds, always coveted by the Countess, glittered on her delicate old hand.

"Well, all things considered, I think you are right," she rejoined slowly. "We will decide to leave it all to Charles."

Then these two cowardly old gentlewomen went downstairs to luncheon, and vied with each other in paying delicate attentions to "poor Caroline." Their consciences smote them pretty frequently for keeping silence when they ought to have spoken. And that was the reason why the Countess found them so attentive and kind.

There was another thought in both minds, which they did not utter even to each other. If the necklace was restored, uninjured, whole, without a single ruby missing, would not Caroline restore the money which had compensated her for its loss?

Monday morning came, and Dorothy blundered through the prayers in a way that made Jane turn cold. Caroline appeared just after they had all risen from their knees. They sat down to breakfast, and Miss Earle plunged wildly into the business of filling the cups. It was a funny repast, to which they all looked back afterwards as if they had partaken of it in a dream.

When they had all got up from the table, Caroline passed through an open window to the terrace. In another moment she swept into the room again with a surprised face.

"Here is Charles," she said. "He is coming up the drive in a fly. I wonder what brings him?"

"He is come on family business—he will explain it all to you," replied Dorothy, nervously. "We have left it to him."

"Family business?" repeated the Countess.

"Yes, yes; come into the drawing-room, Caroline. He will have a great deal to say to you."

"You are all so fussy and formal," said Caroline, rather crossly. "I daresay there is nothing in it, after all."

Canon Earle was as much like his sister Dorothy as it is possible for a man to be like a woman. He had the same purely cut features and soft white hair. His eyes were of the same clear grey as hers, but they were perhaps a little colder. He looked what he was—a church dignitary of the old school, clean-shaven, dainty and refined, with an old-fashioned courtliness of manner which always impressed people at once. Never was he anything but courtly, even when he said cutting things.

"We have said nothing to Caroline yet," murmured Dorothy, going up to him with evident nervousness. "We felt it would come best from you, Charles. Please prepare her at once."

If Canon Earle disliked his task, he did not shrink from it. He met the Countess with his usual charming smile.

"They have not told you the good news, Caroline," he began, easily. "Your necklace has been found at last. Godwin, poor boy, is coming here presently, with some of his friends. He naturally wants to prove his innocence."

But the news did not seem good to the Countess. She turned rather pale, and there came an unpleasant glitter into her eyes.

"Those who hide can find, Charles," she said, coldly.

"Ah, but I fancy Godwin will succeed even in convincing you that he did not hide anything of yours. He is prepared with the plainest proofs. That old merchant—poor Grace's father-in-law, you know—is coming with him."

"Old Corder!" cried Caroline, with horror. "In this house!"

"Why not? He could rank as a merchant prince if he liked. My dear sister, this is a levelling age; we can't succeed in keeping people on their old standing-ground. But probably this will be his first and last visit. Do you know that he has taken Godwin into partnership?"

"Charles," said the Countess, solemnly, "I can't think how you can be so blind. People who are rich can afford to prove anything. I daresay Godwin has paid somebody to confess the theft. It is awful—disgraceful! He will come here with a set of false witnesses, and you, a clergyman, will give him your countenance!"

There was something so dreadfully impressive in her look and tone, that Dorothy and Jane trembled. But the canon did not tremble in the least.

"I am not a fool, Caroline," he said, composedly. "Perhaps you will see, by-and-bye, that I do not give my support to anyone who can't justly claim it."

"What if I refuse to be present at this meeting?" the Countess demanded haughtily. "What if I say that I will not appear till these men are out of the house?"

"Why then, Caroline, we shall believe that, for certain reasons of your own, you are afraid to confront them."

At these words, very coolly and quietly uttered, the Countess grew still paler, and was silent.

The Lindricks and Mr. Redburn were the first to arrive. The Colonel was a little constrained; old Redburn gruff and sulky; but Alma came up with sweet words and a pleading smile.

"You won't send me away, Miss Earle?" she entreated. "I do so want to hear everything. We are so rejoiced to find that poor Godwin was misjudged. What mistakes there must have been!"

And then she fell back, and established herself by old Redburn's side. Dorothy and Jane were far too nervous to talk. They could not help casting anxious glances towards the windows. A little clock on the chimney-piece struck eleven. There was a sound of wheels upon the drive; two flies were coming up to the door.

"He is bringing troops of people," muttered Caroline, scornfully.

The first fly drew up to the terrace-steps. Godwin jumped out, and was followed by Mr. Corder, and a quiet-looking man with white hair. The second fly moved up; Vordenberg descended, and helped out a lady, small, and full of figure. A few seconds more, and these five persons were ushered into the room.

Canon Earle and Dorothy were standing near the entrance to receive them. As Godwin came in, his uncle grasped his hand warmly; and Dorothy held up her fair old face to be kissed. At that moment Jane, chancing to look at the Countess, saw that she had become white as death, and was grasping her daughter's arm.

"That man—that man!" Olga heard her say.

Vordenberg, tall and stately as ever, towered above everyone else in the room. What was this that Godwin was saying? Jane's head had begun to swim, and Dorothy was filled with hopeless bewilderment.

"Aunt Dorothy—let me introduce Count Gliska."

No wonder the canon received his nephew's friend so cordially; no wonder that the old ladies were so confused and surprised. The name that had just been spoken was well-known in wider circles than this—well-known and always revered. Not only for his misfortunes, but for his own remarkable gifts and blameless life, was Count Gliska honoured wherever his name was heard.

"Mr. Burnett," said Godwin, presenting the white-haired man, who bowed very quietly. Then the three Earles shook hands very graciously with Mr. Corder, and looked inquiringly at the veiled lady who kept somewhat in the background. But Godwin did not

mention her name. He gave her a chair, and she seated herself without a word. Nor did he bestow any greeting beyond a distant bow upon the Lindricks and old Redburn.

Caroline had sunk down into the corner of a couch, placed almost at the end of the long room. She had got her daughter's hand, and was holding it fast. Her face was still colourless; her breath came so quickly that Olga, frightened and astonished, looked round for a smelling-bottle. But the two elder sisters were absorbed; and Caroline had to struggle with her agitation alone.

"My friend Earle has promised," said Count Gliska (no longer Vordenberg), "to leave the task of his vindication in my hands. About myself, I have only a few words to say. After my escape from my enemies, I took refuge with my father's old friend in Vienna—a Mr. Vordenberg—and with him I spent several quiet years. He died, leaving me all that he possessed; and, for certain reasons of my own, I adopted his name when I came to England. It is not necessary to enter into those reasons at this moment, for they have nothing whatever to do with the matter which we have in hand. I am here to prove Godwin Earle's innocence of the crime that has been so wrongfully imputed to him; and the first witness I shall call is Mr. Burnett, the well-known jeweller and silversmith of Bond Street.

Thus summoned, the white-haired man came quietly forward. The Countess, still panting in her corner, gave Olga's hand a convulsive pressure that almost made the girl scream.

"It is exactly six years ago," Burnett began, "since a Russian nobleman, Count Gradizoff by name, came into my shop with an old customer of mine, who introduced him to me. The Count's errand was soon explained. He had come to dispose of a valuable ruby necklace. I invited him to step into my private room; and there the necklace was produced in the presence of myself and my partner."

He paused, and took out of his breast-pocket a flat leather case, which he held unopened in his hand.

"When the necklace was shown to me," he continued, "I recognised it at once as the one which had belonged to Count Gliska. Many years before, when I had had occasion to visit Warsaw, I had seen the Count, and had bought from him some old family plate. He had shown me his jewels, and I had minutely examined this necklace. The rubies are very fine—his initials are engraved on the clasp, which is a curious piece of workmanship."

Going towards a table, Burnett opened the case, and laid it down for everyone to see.

(To be concluded.)

IN A DANGEROUS STRAIT.

By MARY E. PENN.

THE close of a bright spring evening some eighteen years ago.

A lingering ray of sunlight flickers across a quiet, suburban street, in the great manufacturing town of Hammerton, and slanting through the uncurtained window of an engraver's workroom, rests on the head of its occupant, bent low over his task.

He is a tall, slightly-built man of seven or eight and twenty, with a face full of intelligence and refinement; a firm but sweet-tempered mouth, and calm, luminous brown eyes, which have faced the world's frown without losing a whit of their brightness and courage.

The son of a struggling artist, who had left him no inheritance but debts and unsold pictures, Gilbert Haviland had early made acquaintance with those stern realities of life: poverty, toil, and care. They were his daily companions still, though latterly, his heart had opened to admit a guest whose presence robbed them of half their bitterness.

A fresh girlish voice in the next room was singing Dekker's brave old song, "The Happy Heart," and presently, a light footstep sounded outside the door, causing him to look round with an expectant smile.

"Oh sweet content!" sang the girl. "Honest labour wears a lovely face——"

Then, putting in her pretty head of curly bronze-brown hair, she added:

"Doesn't the 'honest labourer' want his tea? It is quite ready."

"Presently, dear," he answered; "I have something to finish first."

"No; 'presently' will not do; there are crumpets, which don't improve with waiting," she said, as she entered, seeming to bring with her into the dingy work-room all the bloom and freshness of spring.

Gilbert's smile of tender admiration betrayed his heart's secret, as he glanced at the bright gipsy face, with its piquant combination of warm, sun-kissed complexion and blue eyes. No word of love had yet been spoken between himself and his cousin, Janet Ray, who at his mother's invitation had come to share their home when her father's death left her an orphan, a year ago. But he knew that the girl understood his heart as well as he did himself, and would be content to wait till he was in a position to claim her.

"Even the prospect of crumpets won't tempt me to leave this plate unfinished, but I have only a few touches to put in," he replied, as he shook back his hair, and rounded his shoulders to his task again.

"Very well ; I shall wait for you," she said ; and dragging a high leather-seated stool to his side, she perched herself upon it, leaning her elbows on the "bench."

"What is it you are doing ? who is it for ?" she asked, watching the tiny chips of metal as they curled up beneath his tool.

"An illustrated circular for Mapleton and Co. I am now, as you perceive, putting the finishing-touches to an extremely realistic tea-kettle."

Janet drew down her lips. "An ironmonger's circular ! I did not know you accepted common work like that."

"Accept it ? aye, and am glad to get it. The engraving trade is not what it was, Jeanie, before printing and lithography ruined it. Small craftsmen like myself can't afford to be proud."

She ruffled her pretty hair discontentedly.

"Whatever made you choose to be an engraver ?"

"Well, there wasn't much choice in the matter. I drifted into it. You see I had never been trained for any trade or profession, for though, I got some notions of art from my father, he gave me no regular teaching. But I had picked up a knowledge of engraving from an old workman who lodged in our house ; and when my poor father died, leaving the dear mother dependent on me, it seemed the only thing I could turn to with a prospect of success. That is how I came to be in a 'square hole' instead of a round one," he concluded, with a smiling glance at her.

"It is a shame !" Janet exclaimed, her sympathy all the keener for his patience. "You were not meant for this drudgery ; you are a born artist, Gilbert. Look at your clever etchings ; and your illustrations for the 'Warwickshire Messenger.'"

"With their queer perspective, and still queerer anatomy," he put in laughing. "No, no, Jeanie ; you cannot blind me to the fact that years of study and practice are required before I can call myself an artist ; so I must stick to the graver at present, and make the best of it. And now for tea and crumpets," he added, as he laid down his tool. "I shall work no more this evening, for Monsieur de Fontenay is coming."

"Again ! This is the fourth time you have invited him within the last ten days, Gilbert."

"He invited himself this time, Jeanie. He said he had a proposal to make to me with reference to some drawings. I couldn't very well put him off, even had I wished to——"

"Which of course you did not," she interrupted resentfully. "I think that Frenchman has bewitched you, Gilbert. It is barely three months since you made his acquaintance through engraving a ring for him, and now you and he are hand-in-glove together. You are not usually so ready to make friends of strangers."

"Strangers are not usually so ready to prove themselves friends to me," Gilbert answered, turning away to gather his tools together.

Something peculiar in his tone struck Miss Ray's ear. "You speak as though you were under an obligation to him, Gilbert!"

"So I am—for his society. It is seldom I have an opportunity of talking to a man of his stamp—a cultured and accomplished gentleman. Why you dislike him I cannot imagine."

"I hardly know myself," she acknowledged; "but I do dislike and distrust him heartily, in spite of his culture and accomplishments; and I can't get it out of my mind that he has some hidden motive in coming here."

Gilbert glanced at her pretty face with a smile. She coloured and looked annoyed.

"Oh, it is not on my account that he began his visits here, if that is what you mean," she said resentfully. "He took to haunting your workroom, and inviting you to his house long before he saw me or your mother. I cannot divest myself of the feeling that there's a mystery about him which we can't fathom. Who and what is he, to begin with?"

"That is easily answered, Jeanie. He is a political refugee; the last surviving member of an old and noble family, noted for devotion to the House of Orleans, and therefore in bad odour with the present Imperial Government. I believe, in fact, that he has been concerned in a conspiracy against it, and still belongs to a secret Royalist Society."

"Ah; I saw him in the town the other day with an elderly Frenchman who looked very like a 'conspirator.'"

"Had he a cloak and lantern à la Guy Fawkes?"

"No; but he had an ugly sinister face, and a furtive sort of expression, as if he were accustomed to being watched," answered Jeanie. "M. de Fontenay and he were in such close confabulation that they did not see me pass. They were talking secrets, evidently—plotting, perhaps."

He laughed. "Very likely. But their plots are no business of ours, Jeanie."

"No—so long as you are not drawn into them. I have fancied lately—don't be angry, Gilbert—that there is a sort of secret understanding between you and M. de Fontenay; and I have feared ——"

"That I too was turning conspirator?" he suggested, with a look of amusement. "Make your mind quite easy on that score, my child. I never kept a secret in my life; at least ——"

He checked himself with some embarrassment, and left the sentence unfinished. Drawing her hand through his arm he led her away.

The curtains were closed, but the lamp was not yet lighted, when they entered the parlour; a homely little room enough, with its worn carpet and plain furniture, yet snug and cheerful, and bearing evidences of taste and refinement in the few well-chosen ornaments;

the open piano, the books and pictures, and the vase of spring flowers which adorned the daintily spread tea-table.

Near the window was a smaller table, strewed with the materials for embroidery ; and in a low chair beside the hearth, sat Mrs. Haviland, a fair, refined, fragile-looking woman, with Gilbert's soft brown eyes and wavy hair.

"All in the dark, mother?" he said.

"Yes, dear; it is 'blindman's holiday,'" she answered, looking up with a smile. "Janet and I have been hard at work this afternoon, and Mr. Chasuble's altar-cloth is nearly finished. Light the lamp, Jeanie, and let Gilbert see it."

"In a moment; I have not put myself to rights yet," said Gilbert, as he left the room.

Janet lit the lamp and stood for a moment looking absently at the fire: then spoke suddenly.

"Auntie, did you know that Gilbert had a secret?"

"A secret, dear? What sort of secret?"

"I don't know, but I believe, from something in his manner, that M. de Fontenay is connected with it. I shall dislike that man more than ever if he is going to make Gilbert as reserved and mysterious as he is himself."

Mrs. Haviland smiled. "Poor M. de Fontenay! he is your *bête noire*, Jeanie. I must say you are rather unfair to him. So far from being mysterious, he seems to me particularly open and communicative. That is his ring," she added, as there was a summons at the front door; "now do, dear, try to be civil to him for once."

There was a sound of voices in the hall, and Gilbert entered, dressed for the evening, ushering in de Fontenay. He was a tall and strikingly distinguished looking man of three or four and thirty, with a clear olive complexion, a black moustache, and handsome bold dark eyes. He spoke English with the fluency of a native, and bore himself with the well-bred ease of a thorough man of the world.

As Janet noticed his cordial manner to Gilbert, and the gentle deference with which he greeted Mrs. Haviland, she felt half ashamed of her unreasonable antipathy; but it returned, strongly as ever, directly the bold dark eyes were turned upon her with that look of suppressed but passionate admiration which she resented as a tacit insult.

At the tea-table Janet scarcely spoke to him, keeping her eyes obstinately bent another way. He addressed his conversation chiefly to her companions, but she could see him watching her covertly, under his long dark lashes.

When the tray had been removed, he produced a folio he had brought with him, and unclosing it, showed that it contained a number of large mounted photographs.

"I want you, Haviland, when you have leisure," he said, "to do

me a series of etchings from these photos, which were taken from pictures in the gallery of the Château de Fontenay. You will be at a disadvantage in not having seen the originals, but those, alas! were sold and dispersed with the rest of my household gods when I became an exile and a wanderer."

"You have given me a very pleasant task," Gilbert replied; "and I will do my best to achieve it to your satisfaction. I see that there are some portraits among them."

"Yes—dead and gone de Fontenays. You need not copy those; I don't care enough for my ancestors to make them interesting."

"You have preserved the family type," Gilbert said, smiling. "This"—indicating a half-length figure in the costume of the Grand Monarque's days—"might be yourself in fancy dress."

He glanced at it and laughed. "I am flattered by the resemblance. That is Baron Enguerraud de Fontenay, one of the blackest sheep in the family flock—and there have been not a few among us," he added, coolly. "We are a reckless, spendthrift, ne'er-do-well stock, we de Fontenays, though we have somehow managed in all our follies to keep honour intact. 'Tout est perdu, fors l'honneur,' might be our motto."

"An unsullied name is an inheritance to be proud of," observed Mrs. Haviland.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Unfortunately one cannot live on it, madame," he answered cynically. "'When lands are gone, and money spent,' as the old song says, honour is but a barren heritage. That is enough of pictures for the present. Will Mademoiselle Jeanne oblige us with a little music?"

Jeanie shook her head. "I could not venture to play before so accomplished a musician as yourself, monsieur."

He did not press her, but, taking his seat at the piano, struck a few masterly chords, then glided into the "Moonlight Sonata."

Attracted, in spite of herself, by the exquisite music, Janet approached, and stood watching the slender but powerful fingers, on one of which a great ruby gleamed, blood red.

Presently, without removing his hands from the keys, he glanced round at Gilbert and his mother. They were still absorbed in the pictures and talking with animation.

"What a pleasant, peaceful home interior!" he murmured, keeping up a subdued ripple of accompaniment. "A haven of rest, it seems, to a storm-tossed wanderer like myself. Every form of what the world calls pleasure I have known, but the joys of home—never, or I might have been a better man."

"Perhaps you would have found them insipid," she said.

He smiled rather bitterly. "I understand you: you think me incapable of appreciating innocent pleasures—you may even doubt my capacity for affection. But there you are wrong. World-hardened as I am, I can still love, deeply, passionately; and for the

loved one I would do and dare all. I would sacrifice fortune, honour, life itself, in her service."

His voice barely rose above a whisper, but there was a thrill of passionate earnestness in it which startled Jeanie. She drew back and answered coldly:

"That sounds well, monsieur; but it seldom happens in real life that a man is called upon to make any such sacrifices. The affection best worth having is that which will stand the test of daily companionship; which shows itself in little unobtrusive acts of kindness, in patience and tenderness and self-abnegation."

Involuntarily she glanced towards Gilbert. Her listener frowned, and played a jarring discord.

"Such ideal perfection is beyond me," he returned. "And yet, if a woman cared for me enough to bear with my faults, she might find some good in me still. Her influence might raise me to a higher level, and I might learn to live worthily for her sweet sake."

There was a moment's silence. Janet dared not look at him, but she felt that his dark eyes were riveted on her face with a gaze which seemed to magnetise her.

Suddenly he changed his position, and played the introductory symphony of a song, the "*Chanson de Tortunio*:"—

Si je vous le disais, pourtant, que je vous aime,
Qui sait, brune aux yeux bleus, ce que vous en diriez.

As his mellow baritone voice lingered on the last words, she involuntarily glanced at him; but the look she encountered made her eyes quickly droop again, and brought a hot flush of colour to her cheeks.

"Jeanne, I love you!" he breathed, in a quick, passionate undertone; and, affecting to pick up a loose sheet of music, he stooped and laid his lips to her hand.

The girl started and snatched it away.

"Do not shrink from me, my sweetest," he pleaded, in the same suppressed but vehement tone. "Tell me that I may hope; tell me that you will——"

"Oh, no—it is impossible!" she interrupted hurriedly. "Please say no more; you only distress me."

His face changed, an expression crossing it which made it almost menacing.

"So be it; I am silenced," he said in an altered voice. "Yet it might have been better had you listened to me; better for you—and for someone else also. It is safer to have me for a friend than a rival."

The girl threw up her head and looked at him defiantly.

"Is that a threat, monsieur?"

"No, merely a warning," he replied, as he rose and left the piano.

"You have given us a treat, M. de Fontenay," Mrs. Haviland said, looking up; "but I fear Gilbert has been sadly inattentive to your music. He is fascinated by these pictures."

"By the way, Haviland, I find there is one I have omitted to bring," their visitor remarked—"not a photograph, but an engraving, which I wish to have copied in facsimile. However, you will see it when next you call. Suppose you come and dine with me to-morrow evening, if you have no other engagement. And now," he continued, "I will take my leave. Au revoir, madame, and thanks for a delightful evening."

He shook hands with her cordially, but to Janet he merely bowed, with an exaggerated deference in which there seemed a touch of irony.

When Gilbert returned to the sitting-room after showing out their guest, he found his cousin alone. She was standing at the table, looking absently at the scattered photographs.

"Congratulate me on my good fortune, Jeanie," he began. "This commission gives me just the sort of work I was longing for."

"I am pleased you have the commission, but sorry it came from M. de Fontenay," she replied.

"Oh, you are incorrigible!" he exclaimed, in a tone of vexation. "Will it remove your prejudice against him, Jeanie, if I tell you that he saved me from ruin?"

She started, looking at him in wondering inquiry. He nodded gravely.

"It is a fact. To explain it I must tell you what I have hitherto kept a secret, even from my mother. Ever since my father died, Janet, I have been struggling under a debt, which, Quixotically perhaps, I took upon myself to save his memory from dishonour. The money had been borrowed from Screwton, the attorney, who promised to give me time to repay it in instalments. About a month ago, however, he came down upon me by demanding payment in full, under a threat of legal proceedings. I was at my wits' end, not knowing where to turn for help, when de Fontenay came to my rescue——"

"How did he know of it?" interrupted Janet.

"He heard of it from Screwton—he knows him. De Fontenay, in the most delicate and friendly manner, came to me with an offer of assistance. He would not hear of my refusing it; he insisted upon advancing me sufficient money to discharge the debt in full."

Janet drew in her lips, looking perplexed and uneasy.

"Did it strike you that such generosity was extraordinary on the part of a comparative stranger?"

"It would have been from anyone else; but de Fontenay is liberal and open-handed to a fault."

"So now he is your creditor instead of Mr. Screwton? I would rather you were in the attorney's power than his, Gilbert. How much was the debt?"

"Three hundred pounds."

She uttered an exclamation of dismay. "When shall you be able to repay it?"

"In time—and de Fontenay is not likely to hurry me," he said cheerfully. "I feel that I have it in me to succeed, Janet, if I can only get a start in the right groove. This commission of his may be the first step towards that brilliant future you are so fond of predicting for me."

He stole an arm round her waist and drew her to his side. "You know for whose sake I am anxious to succeed," he whispered, looking down at her with tender seriousness. "I have never before put my hopes into words, but I think you have guessed them, Jeanie?"

"Yes," she said simply.

But even as her sweet lips met his, and they took their first long, lingering kiss of love, Janet shivered with a vague foreboding of coming trouble.

II.

THOUGH M. de Fontenay was fond of alluding to himself as a poor man, there were no signs of poverty in his manner of living. The house which he had taken, when he settled in Hammerton, some six months before making Gilbert's acquaintance, was a large and handsome one, standing in an aristocratic suburb of the town.

The "Priory," as it was called, a comparatively old house, was a square, substantial building, of mellow-tinted red brick, so thickly sheltered by trees and shrubs as to be invisible from the road; and though its exterior was typically English, in its look of solid respectability, it was as thoroughly French inside as if it had been transported bodily from the environs of Paris. M. de Fontenay's fastidious taste was shown in the rich but subdued elegance of the furniture and decorations.

Gilbert Haviland proceeded to keep his dinner engagement at the appointed hour, and was admitted by an English footman; but M. de Fontenay's valet, and confidential servant, Luigi—a soft-voiced, obsequious Italian—came forward to relieve him of his hat and overcoat, and usher him into the "salon." It was a long, lofty room on the ground floor, with furniture of inlaid ebony; panelled walls, a polished floor, and two tall windows draped with olive-green plush.

To his surprise, for he had expected to dine tête-à-tête with his host, he found two other visitors present, who were introduced to him respectively as the Vicomte de Sanzac and Monsieur Docquois. The former, a young man, was a type of a Parisian dandy of the "Third Empire;" with a handsome but dissipated face, a waxed moustache, a glass screwed into his eye, and an expression of amiable self-sufficiency.

Docquois, whom Gilbert fancied he recognised as Janet's "con-

spirator," was a haggard, sallow-complexioned man of forty ; his eyes were dark and restless, with a sullen, lowering look, which certainly merited the description, "sinister." The two guests were as great a contrast in manner as in appearance, the Vicomte being just as talkative and expansive as M. Docquois was taciturn and reserved.

They were alike, however, in the marked deference with which they treated their host, and also in the close and curious scrutiny which they bestowed on Gilbert himself.

Glancing towards them as he exchanged a few words with de Fontenay, he found Docquois watching him furtively under his heavy brows, while the Vicomte, twirling his waxed moustache surveyed him from head to foot with undisguised curiosity. Feeling somewhat uncomfortable under this fire of eyes, he was not sorry when dinner was announced, and they crossed the hall to the dining-room.

"Monsieur Docquois understands but does not speak English, so I shall put you near de Sanzac, who will be charmed to show off his knowledge of your language," the host said, as they took their places at the perfectly appointed dinner-table, with its glittering array of glass and silver. "Convince him if you can that the sun does sometimes shine in this foggy island."

"There is a week I have been in England, and every day it has rained more or less, generally more," remarked the Vicomte.

"April is usually a rainy month, even in France, is it not?" Gilbert asked, good-temperedly.

The other shrugged his shoulders. "Cher Monsieur, I adore England ; but your climate gives me the horrors."

"I may plead that we have learned how to indemnify ourselves for its defects by home comforts," said Gilbert smiling.

"Oh, you have a genius for 'le confort,' I admit ; but for me, look you, I am a child of the south. Sunlight is as necessary to my happiness as ——"

"As pretty women and good wine, for example," put in M. de Fontenay. "Apropos—try my Xères, Vicomte."

M. Docquois, who was supping his soup noisily from the end of his spoon, glanced at the sprightly Vicomte with an unpleasant smile. "You have just narrowly escaped being deprived of the materials for happiness for some time to come," he said sneeringly.

"True ; but under those painful circumstances I should at least have enjoyed the consolation of your society, mon cher," the other replied quickly and coolly ; "and such genial companionship might make even a prison endurable."

Gilbert raised his head with an involuntary look of surprised inquiry, which M. de Fontenay answered.

"Ah, my dear Haviland, in spite of its climate, England is a happy country," he said. "You may not have sunshine, but you have freedom ; freedom, social, religious and political. Every man can speak the thing he thinks, without danger of finding himself

within prison walls—as our friend here would have done, but for his timely trip across the Channel.”

De Sanzac laughed and filled his glass.

“You see what a dangerous character you have for a neighbour, M. Haviland,” he remarked lightly. “We make no stranger of you,” he added, in a curious tone; “we know that you will not betray us.”

“Oh, there is no fear of that,” de Fontenay said quietly, and changed the subject.

In spite of the host's geniality and the conversational powers of one of the guests, the dinner was not a success. Gilbert felt unaccountably constrained and ill-at-ease, and it was a relief to him when they adjourned for cigars to the study.

The latter apartment had been built by the present tenant, and was connected with the other part of the house by a long corridor with a padded door at each end. It was a spacious but somewhat gloomy room, lined on three sides with bookshelves; it had heavy oak furniture, a wide open fire-place, and an elaborately carved chimney-piece. In a recess at one end stood an exquisite statue of Psyche, a copy from the antique; its marble whiteness gleaming coldly against the dark background.

After the warm and brilliant dining-room the place looked chill and sombre, lighted only by a shaded lamp on the reading-table, which cast a bright circle of radiance on the scattered books and papers, leaving the corners of the room in shadowy obscurity.

The discreet Luigi brought in a tray containing coffee, cognac and liqueurs, placed another log of wood on the hearth (M. de Fontenay abjured both coal and gas) and retired noiselessly as he had come.

“That fellow comes and goes like a ghost,” observed de Sanzac, as he rolled a fresh cigarette.

“Or like a spy,” growled Docquois, giving his coffee a liberal “bracing” of cognac. “I don't like your model valet, de Fontenay. He is too sly and cat-footed for me.”

“Luigi? Oh, he is an excellent fellow, and the best servant in the world. But he has a trick of leaving the door open. Vicomte, will you oblige me by seeing if it is shut?”

De Sanzac glanced at him, then smiled and crossed the room to the door, which was screened by a tapestry *portière*.

Gilbert fancied—it could only have been fancy—that he heard the click of a key in the lock as the young Frenchman put his hand under the curtain.

“All right,” he said jauntily, coming back with his hands in his pockets. “We can talk secrets without danger of eaves-droppers.”

“Oh, we are not going to talk secrets,” the master of the house replied, as he pushed the cigar-stand towards Gilbert. “Though there is a little matter of business between Mr. Haviland and myself

which may as well be settled now as later. I have been thinking," he continued, addressing the engraver, "that it might be more satisfactory to have our agreement about the etchings in writing. You are contented with the terms I proposed when we parted last night?"

"More than contented; they are far too liberal," said Gilbert.

"On the contrary, in accepting them you leave me your debtor," was the courteous reply, as de Fontenay opened a writing case on the table. "Then will you kindly put your signature to this memorandum? You see," he added laughing, "I am nothing if not business-like—the result of my residence in England, I suppose."

The young man took the paper from his hand, and was about to affix his signature without looking at the contents when his friend interrupted him. "My good fellow, have I to teach you, a practical, cautious Englishman, never to sign a document without reading it? Why even our feather-brained de Sanzac would know better than that."

Gilbert laughed, and putting up his eyeglass glanced through the memorandum. "It is perfectly correct," he said, as he dipped his pen in the ink. At the same moment, the vivacious Vicomte, stretching across to reach the cognac bottle, contrived to upset his coffee, which poured in a stream across the table.

"*Maladroit!*" exclaimed the host, springing to his feet to avoid being inundated.

"I beg ten thousand pardons," drawled the other, who, however did not seem much disconcerted by his mishap.

"There is no great harm done," rejoined de Fontenay; "I will ring for Luigi presently. What has become of the memorandum?—Oh, here it is, on the floor," he added, stooping to pick it up.

Without looking at it again, Gilbert signed his name and handed him the paper.

"So—that is settled," de Fontenay said with a satisfied smile, and a glance at the other two, who were smiling also. "And now," he continued, "I will show you the engraving I mentioned, which you have kindly promised to copy for me. It has no particular merit as a work of art, but there are circumstances which render it particularly interesting and valuable—as my friends can tell you."

"*Parbleu!*" muttered Docquois, with his ill-favoured smile; while the Vicomte, who seemed to have had quite as much wine as was good for him, burst into an immoderate fit of laughter.

"Interesting and valuable!" he echoed, when he could speak: "I believe you! Show me the work of art which comes up to it. But let us see this treasure, de Fontenay. Where do you keep it?—In an iron safe? In a jewelled shrine?"

"No," said the other calmly; "I keep it—in my purse," and opening his porte-monnaie he drew out a folded paper which he tossed across the table to Gilbert.

The other two approached and watched the young man curiously

as he bent towards the light of the lamp and examined it, holding it close to his short-sighted eyes.

He uttered an involuntary exclamation of surprise, and looked up at his friend. "You are joking, of course," he said with a smile.

"I never was more serious," replied the latter, whose face was indeed grave and stern enough now.

Gilbert glanced bewilderingly at the paper again. "But—I don't understand," he stammered. "This is a Bank of England note for a thousand pounds."

"Exactly," the Frenchman rejoined; "and that is the 'engraving' which you have promised to copy in facsimile."

The young man started, and rose to his feet, his eyes dilating with a sudden horrible suspicion. "Good heavens! you do not mean ——"

"I mean precisely what I say," de Fontenay interrupted with imperturbable calmness. "You will not deny your promise, I suppose? Here it is, in black and white. You agree to join our fraternity, and to place your professional skill at our service for a consideration, which is specified."

"That is not the paper I read."

"That is the paper you signed. See, here is your name, with the ink scarcely dry upon it."

"Then you substituted that for the other," Gilbert said quickly. "Ah!" he added with sudden enlightenment. "I understand it all now! This is the climax of a deep-laid scheme. It was for this you played the comedy of friendship, and got me into your power—to make me your tool and accomplice. I was to turn forger to oblige you! You must have been mad to think I should consent."

"It is you who are the madman if you refuse," muttered Docquois in a tone of menace there was no mistaking.

De Fontenay silenced him by a gesture.

"My dear Haviland," he said, in a voice of friendly remonstrance, "I think you scarcely understand your position. If you reflect, you will see that you have no alternative but to yield. You are at my mercy. I can ruin you, for this agreement is so worded that I can make use of it against you without compromising myself——"

"Before you had time to do so, I should denounce you as an impostor and a felon," struck in Gilbert, courageously.

"Excuse me; a felon I may be, but an impostor I am not. That I am a spendthrift and a gambler is pretty well known to my friends; but that I have descended to crime in order to avoid the misery and humiliation of poverty is, as yet, my own secret. Denounce me if you like, and see who will believe, on *your* word, that Raoul de Fontenay is a 'felon.'"

"Oh, M. Haviland will do nothing so imprudent; he will make a virtue of necessity, and become one of us," spoke de Sanzac, rolling a fresh cigarette. "You must not confound us with vulgar

faussaires, M. Haviland; our workmen are artists in their way, and our agents belong to a rank of life which places them above suspicion. It happens that we are at present in want of an engraver, the post having become vacant through the—a—temporary retirement of one of our confrères—a retirement which Docquois and I were very near sharing by the way," he added with a laugh. "It is a brilliant opportunity for you, as we are just now breaking fresh ground, having at length succeeded in imitating the peculiar texture of the Bank of England paper; and that's the whole story. The work is simple, the remuneration munificent. You accept—yes?"

Gilbert drew a deep breath, and glanced at the master of the house, who, during his friend's fluent harangue had been standing with his arms folded.

He met the young man's eyes with a sombre smile. "Well," he said, "you do not speak. Are we to understand that you consent?"

"You are to understand," the young Englishman replied, all his nerves thrilling with excitement, "that I would rather cut off my right hand than use it in your service. And now you will allow me to go."

As he turned to leave the room, words from de Fontenay arrested him. "The door is locked and the key in my pocket," he said, deliberately.

"Open it, sir, or I will rouse the house!" said Gilbert.

"You may shout till you are hoarse; no sound will pass the walls of this room," returned de Fontenay coolly. "It was built to hold a secret, and nothing that could compromise us has ever escaped it. The grave itself is not more discreet."

Gilbert understood the veiled menace; he felt that he turned pale, but he answered in a tone of contemptuous indifference: "Your threat does not alarm me, Monsieur de Fontenay; you would scarcely be so mad as to attempt my life, knowing that if I disappeared this house would be the first place searched for me."

"It might be searched from garret to basement and no trace of you would be found, were it necessary for our safety that you should 'disappear.' See here."

He walked to the statue of *Psyche*, and drawing out the movable pedestal on which it stood, pressed a concealed spring in the panelled niche. Instantly a door flew open, revealing a cupboard or closet, about the height of a man, but not more than two feet deep, contrived in the thickness of the wall. Taking up the lamp, he threw its light into the recess, which contained a few papers and a small iron safe; then he glanced over his shoulder at Gilbert.

"Do you understand?" he asked, with the same dark smile.

"While the police were searching for you, while pretty Jeanne was lamenting you, while your friends and enemies were putting their own construction on your disappearance, you would be here—safely gagged and bound, and left to suffocate at your leisure."

The young man gasped as if he were already suffocating. The horror of the idea overpowered him.

De Fontenay advanced a step nearer to him, lowering his voice. "And while you were lying perdu here, mon ami, it should be my pleasant task to console that sweet young demoiselle—not a very difficult one, I fancy. She might mourn for you at first, but she would soon learn to forget you—in my arms."

Before he could utter another word, Gilbert lifted his hand, and struck him in the face. Then, with the energy of desperation he dashed across the room, and seized the bell-rope.

Quick as he was, Docquois, who had been watching him closely, anticipated the movement, and snatched it from him. The two men struggled for a moment, when Gilbert, catching his foot in the hearth-rug, fell heavily, dragging his assailant with him. At the same instant de Sanzac uttered a hasty exclamation.

"Hush—what was that?" he breathed. "Someone is at the door!"

Docquois started to his feet; but Gilbert, whose head had struck the fender in his fall, rose with difficulty.

"Keep him quiet—do you hear?" de Fontenay said in a hurried whisper to Docquois.

His confederate nodded. Gilbert, who, dazed and giddy, had sunk into a chair, felt a cold touch on his temple—the steel barrel of a revolver, which the Frenchman was holding to his head.

"Who is there?" de Fontenay demanded, through the door, which was being knocked at.

"It is I, Monsieur," his valet's voice replied. "A gentleman desires to see you."

His master unlocked the door, and opened it a few inches.

"A gentleman?" he repeated; "a visitor at this hour! Who is it? what name does he give?"

"None, Monsieur. He says that he is a stranger to you, but that he comes on urgent business —"

"On business so urgent that it cannot be delayed for a moment, M. de Fontenay," put in another voice; and the door was thrust open, and two strangers made a sudden irruption into the room.

"*Mille tonnerres!*" shouted Docquois; "the police!"

"Just so," replied the first speaker, a tall burly man of middle age, whom Gilbert recognised as the local superintendent; "and to save you the fatigue of useless resistance I may mention that my men are here, within call, and that the house is also guarded outside, back and front. This is the man, is it not?" he continued, indicating de Fontenay, as he turned to his companion, who wore a moustache and imperial, and a tight-waisted frock-coat.

"Yes, that is our bird," the French detective replied airily, "and a knowing one he is. It has been a ticklish business to catch him;

but he is in the net at last. The other two are ours also, but the third I don't know. Is he one of the gang?"

The question was addressed to Luigi, who stood in the background, an interested and attentive spectator of the scene.

"*Questo è certo!*—he is one of them, or he would not be here," replied the valet, coming forward. "He is an engraver, and has been at the house frequently of late."

De Fontenay turned a strange look on his favourite servant. "So, Luigi, it is you who have betrayed me?" he said quietly.

"With profound regret, and as part of my professional duty, signor, si," the Italian answered, with his usual obsequiousness. "I did not think it necessary to say, when I entered your excellency's service, that I was employed by the police to watch you."

"The game is up then," his master said, with a shrug.

"Yes, the game is up," Gilbert echoed, shaking off his torpor and rising; "for what your servant does not know, I can tell."

"That, by heaven, you shall not!" Docquois interposed, with a furious oath. "One spy and informer is enough for us."

He raised his revolver to Gilbert as he spoke, but de Fontenay caught his arm. "No bloodshed," he said peremptorily; "it will only make matters worse."

As the other jerked his wrist away, there was a sharp report, and de Fontenay staggered back from him, putting his hand to his side.

"You have killed him!" exclaimed de Sanzac with emotion, speaking for the first time since the detectives had entered the room; and he hurried to his friend's assistance.

"I — it is nothing," de Fontenay gasped, though he had turned lividly pale. "If you had wished to serve me, Docquois, you would have taken better aim," he added, with a bitter smile.

"I would rather shoot myself than you, you know that," the latter answered hoarsely. "It was a miserable accident."

"To avoid further accidents, M. Docquois," said the French "agent," blandly, producing a pair of handcuffs from his pocket, "perhaps you will allow me to put on these little ornaments? *Ca y est!* You also, M. le Vicomte, if you please—thousand thanks! As to this gentleman, who is English, I think we have a warrant for his arrest on Mr. Luigi's information. He——"

"Pray allow me to explain!" hastily interrupted Gilbert. "I have no connection whatever with these men; I was entrapped into their company by false——"

"You will have an opportunity of explaining all that before the magistrate to-morrow," struck in the superintendent brusquely; "in the meantime, sir, if you take my advice, you will hold your tongue, and come quietly with us. Now M. de Fontenay, if you are ready—why, what's this?" M. de Fontenay had almost fallen from his chair; his hands were hanging, his head drooped on his breast.

"He is fainting!" exclaimed de Sanzac.

"He is dying," whispered the French detective with sudden gravity, as he raised the drooping face.

Luigi approached, and helped to lift his betrayed and wounded master on to the couch, loosened his cravat and unfastened his waistcoat. De Fontenay had not lost consciousness; his eyes were wide open, and unnaturally bright, but his features looked pinched and drawn, and his rich olive complexion had faded to an ashen pallor. Docquois stood, the image of distress.

"No cause for a long face," spoke de Fontenay to him, with a haggard smile, as he feebly strove to repulse Luigi. "You never did me a better turn than by that chance shot, Docquois, my good friend. No, don't touch me; let me die in peace. But first—" His eyes wandered round till they rested on Gilbert; then he turned, and addressed the superintendent, who was standing near the couch.

"Sir, I have a statement to make which will clear an innocent man from unjust suspicion. Mr. Haviland spoke the truth just now; he—but let it be taken down in writing," he broke off, "and quickly, for my moments are counted."

Clearly and collectedly, though in a voice which grew fainter with every word, he made his confession, and affixed a trembling signature.

Then he looked wistfully at Gilbert again, and the latter crossed the room to his side.

"Haviland, will you forgive me?" he faltered. "I did not mean my threats just now. Villain though I may have been, I am not a murderer; believe that."

Without a word the young man gave him his hand.

"Thanks," he said, his lips parting in a faint smile. "You are a good fellow. You deserve to be happy, and you will be—happy and prosperous with—with the woman you love. Tell her from me that —"

His voice sank so low that the rest of the sentence was inaudible. "Jeanne—'brune aux yeux bleus,'" he muttered; and with a long shivering sigh, fell back on the pillows, dead.

De Fontenay's prophecy was realised. Gilbert Haviland was happy in due course of time, and very prosperous. He is now one of the most popular illustrators of our periodical literature.

Janet and he have partly forgotten the shadows and trials of the past. "But I can never forget the horror of that night, as you related it to me, Gilbert," she says to him sometimes, with a shudder.

"I cannot regret it, when it served to draw us more closely together, my darling," her husband answers tenderly. "All the same, I hope it may never again be my lot to find myself in so dangerous a strait."

LETTERS FROM MAJORCA.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND,"
"UNDER NORTHERN SKIES," ETC., ETC.

Palma, May, 1887.



AN "INSTANTANEOUS" EFFECT.

MY DEAR E.—It is the unexpected which happens. Once more I date to you from Palma de Mallorca. Had anyone said when I last left these shores that before many months were over I should see them again, I must have written False Prophet to his name. Yet it has come to pass. Once again I am in Palma de Mallorca; reviving old influences (old with the age of months only), recalling old scenes.

My last letter I concluded and posted in Barcelona, after they had barbarously kept us waiting three hours and a half on board our steamer (we christened it the *Tantalus*), whilst they landed the Mallorcan pigs, safely if not always soundly. And if pigs think as much of their tails as a Chinaman does of his, great must have been the affront offered to many of them.

As we landed I have said that the last link with Palma fell away, little thinking how soon another link in the chain that bound me to its shores would be forged. Then I had shown you Mallorca in its winter dress: a winter that was warm, smiling, altogether lovely. Now I have to declare the island in the gorgeousness of summer, the blaze of sunshine; an atmosphere not yet tropical, but quite sure to become so.

H. C. is not with me. I have missed him very much. On his part, when he heard that I was coming out a second time, he wrote me word that he had withdrawn into the innermost recesses of the severest monastic institution, and was preparing himself for speedy dissolution. I was to look upon him as dead to the world, literally, not figuratively; and even his place of burial should be unknown and unrecorded. I appreciate this fidelity. It has already been said that hero worship sweetens life, and relieves it of much of its prosiness. It is a charm whose influence increases; and once accustomed to this influence, it is difficult to live without it.

Only a few months ago I wrote to you my last letter, and yet, my sister, what a change has come to our lives! It is as the lapse of

ages. It has been as the rending asunder of rocks ; as the shattering of a universe ; as the sun dying out to us, and the stars falling from the heavens. Our house is left unto us desolate.

I came out here partly with the restlessness of a spirit endeavouring to flee from itself, seeking release from torture and torment, forgetfulness of its daily, nightly desolation. I did wrong. I should have gone to the other ends of the earth ; anywhere rather than here. Every familiar object has been as a sharp knife plunged into an open wound, recalling the days that lie behind this great chasm of months, this awful break in our lives, this convulsion of our hearth ; days when, as far as is possible to me, life still held something of happiness. I trod in my old footsteps. By a strange fatality I occupied over and over again the very same rooms in the hotels, where months ago H. C. and I had laughed and sung and, like the poor Princess Amelia, " had thought the world was made for us."

They rang no more with laughter or with song. They were haunted with ghosts far more terrible than those which come to us from the world of spirits. From each place I longed for the hour of departure, and fled as we flee from our deadliest scourge. Oblivion ? That is not for me !

Did I not tell you in my last letter from Palma of that strange and awful *Something* which has come to me occasionally in life, only too surely a prophet of evil, a harbinger of woe ? Is it merely a chilling shadow of coming events that passes over me ? Or is it a tangible outcome from that world where our destinies are moulded, our deeds recorded, and with which our spirits are linked, however much we may turn them earthwards ? Or is it some terrible power of dating forward into the future when a thunderbolt is about to fall ? I know not, and it matters not. Enough that it is there ; that it needs no explanation ; that time is too certainly its own terrible interpreter.

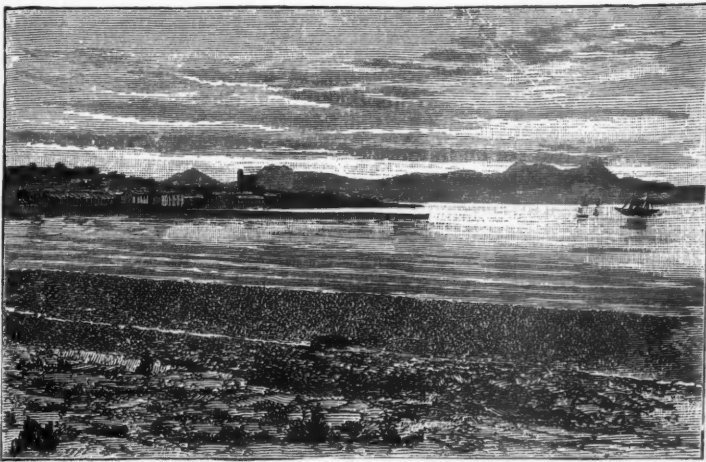
Do you remember how you persuaded me against this second visit to Mallorca ? How you saw it in the right light, whilst my eyes were blinded ? How you said it would never bring me rest and oblivion, but the opposite ? How I, who had once been happy here, could see it from no other point of view, but thought I must be, if not happy—how ever be that again ?—at least less desolate ? I would not be persuaded. I went on in my rash, headstrong way, as I have so often done in life—and so often paid the penalty.

And then there was A.'s attraction to draw me hither.

For, though my journey was to be taken alone, I was coming out here to stay with A. A., whom we had parted from in Soller ; who had come to see us off by the diligence, had warned H. C. against the wiles of that deceitful Delilah ; and had no doubt gone back to flirt with Rosita, and be worshipped in secret and afar off by Mariquita. Ay, I know it was so ; I saw it in Mariquita's shy, gazelle eyes ; though I now declare it to you for the first time.

A. drew me towards Palma with an unseen mesmeric force. I had taken a great liking to him, from our previous intercourse ; still more so from our subsequent correspondence. It seemed mutual. Let me quote once more that we can only understand Shakespeare by the Shakespeare within us : and so I, the hero worshipped, am in turn, the most enthusiastic, determined, and devoted of hero worshippers.

Again, you thought that danger lurked round and about Mallorca, in the air, on the earth, and in its hidden recesses. Do you remember, how, not many weeks ago, when we were in Boulogne, in our old, pleasant rooms at the Hôtel des Bains, you took up our English



BAY OF ALCUDIA.

newspaper which Henri had just laid upon the breakfast table, opened it and gave a scream : a refined and lady-like scream, I admit, but still a scream ?

"EARTHQUAKE IN MAJORCA !" you exclaimed. "That settles the question. You *cannot* go now ; and you should not go for all the A.'s in the world ! I feel quite indebted to the earthquake."

But in the course of time there came a telegram from A. "Earthquake nothing. Rather an agreeable sensation than otherwise. Expecting you by every boat. Waiting on the quay. Don't keep me waiting too long."

And so, in spite of earthquakes, past or future, I still declared for Palma.

In due time we said good-bye to Boulogne : so pleasant in early spring when we have the piers and the sea, and the sands and the fine air all to ourselves : and we returned to England.

Then an idea came to me that I would make for Bordeaux by sea instead of by land, and on a certain Friday, the day of sailing, it blew great guns and all the elements seemed at war.

You accompanied me to the wharf hard by the old Tower of London: where P. M. was also waiting to see me off and wish me Bon voyage. The shipping in the river swayed to and fro, rocked and creaked in the gale; the water was nothing but little waves and creases; we could not hear ourselves speak. You commanded me not to go, and P. M. asked you if he should rush off for a strait-waistcoat, or a quantity of rope. He had once tied up Maskelyne and Cook, and knew the trick well.

I agreed to consult the Captain; and P. and I went off in a boat. The good ship was not alongside, and was lying some little way down the river.

"Rough weather, sir, till to-morrow at noon," said the jolly old skipper of the *Lapwing*. "After that, it will clear up and we shall have a glorious time of it, until we make Bordeaux harbour on Monday morning. A bad sea on in the Bay of Biscay, you ask, sir? Not at all. The Bay of Biscay is much maligned. I tell you that nine times out of ten we have fine weather in the Bay of Biscay, and you'll find it on Sunday as calm as a mill-pond and as blue as the heavens. Danger, sir?" in answer to P.'s anxious enquiry, which I think was made solely as champion of your cause: "who talks of danger, or dreams of it? I don't know the word. 'Fear not, but trust in Providence,' the old song says, and it has been my motto on all occasions."

"I'm afraid you have the best of it," said P., turning to me. "After such a report, I can't conscientiously administer a strait-waistcoat or a rope's-end." (He meant a rope, of course, but I let it pass.)

So I finally decided to go.

Just after doing so a blast came from the four quarters of the heavens which might have shaken the foundations of the good old Tower itself. You shivered and turned pale. The tender came alongside to convey us to the steamer. We said good-bye: that infinitely sad and solemn word. "One last long lingering look we gave." P. almost threw consequences to the gale, and came off with me without bag or baggage; without a With your leave or By your leave to his people at home: almost dared fate and fortune by throwing in his lot with me as far as Bordeaux. You restrained him with gentle influence. And then you both disappeared, and I was left to sorrow and solitude.

It was a great blank. The tender was not yet ready to start, and I went after you for a last word and a last good-bye. I was too late. A grown-up ragamuffin, all tattered and torn, came up to me and touched his cap. "Carriage just gone round the corner with lady and gentleman, sir. Shall I run after it and stop them and bring them back?"

I could hardly restrain his good intentions. He thought it was an elopement; one saw that by his expression. I told him it didn't matter and gave him a sixpence, and he evidently looked upon it as hush money.

The Captain was right to the letter. Until twelve o'clock on Saturday we had such a passage as I do not care to remember. But, just as he had foretold, so at midday it cleared, and thenceforward we steamed under blue skies and upon calm waters.

One's flagging energies revived. I lent a spare great-coat to a fellow passenger who had imprudently packed up all his, which he duly returned to me at Bordeaux. At Barcelona, I suddenly found something hard in a pocket of the said coat. This proved to be a pipe; evidently a favourite and much-used pipe; carefully coloured and splendidly polished. Such a treasure to its owner was no doubt worth a Jew's ransom. He would have suicidal tendencies on finding what he had done. So I packed it carefully in a box, with the following memorandum: "A 'light of other days' restored to its owner:" registered, posted, and sent it off to Biarritz. I wonder whether it ever reached its destination?

In Barcelona I found I should have to wait until Thursday for the Palma boat. But I had the alternative of a Wednesday's boat to Alcudia, another part of the island; and rashly decided for it. I thought it would be a change. It was a change; very much so, indeed. You shall hear.

It was delightful to walk up and down the Rambla in Barcelona. When last here it had been winter, the promenade was comparatively deserted, and the trees were bare. Now it was summer; the heat was intense; the sun blazed and the streets glowed. The magnificent plane trees were in full leaf, and almost met overhead. It was delicious to watch the dancing shadows under our feet, to revel in the cool green tones of the umbrageous (we must use fine words now and then, if only by way of contrast)—the umbrageous foliage above us.

The Rambla was lined with flower stalls; the most wonderful roses and carnations that ever were seen, and in almost overpowering profusion. "Remember, Love, the Feast of Roses," might have applied to Barcelona and to-day. The air was heavy and faint with perfume. One almost walked in a dream; a dream of Eastern splendour. It was all so unlike anything to be found northwards. North and South, indeed, are as separate as earth and sky.

And all the while, up and down the Rambla, moved an animated crowd, who looked as if they had nothing to do but to enjoy themselves in a *dolce-far-niente*, dreamy existence all the days of their life.

I have praised the Spanish men and women; I am not sure that they are not the handsomest race in the world: I have before now fallen in love with the grace and beauty of the fair Andalusians:

but I cannot conscientiously declare that I was greatly struck with the grace and beauty of the women of Barcelona. Rather these virtues seemed conspicuous by their absence. Yet no doubt Barcelona has its share of grace and beauty, without which the world would be unendurable, and life a greater pilgrimage than it is. They did not adorn the Rambla, as far as I discovered, but still we had our Feast of Roses and our perfume-laden air.

You may be sure that I wandered into the Cathedral, where H. C. and I six months ago had been plunged into dreams and visions, religious ecstasies, all the soft and soothing influences of this weird obscurity, this matchless tone. How much I missed my companion! And, such is the force of influence, that every now and then I turned to make a remark, and was met only by the vacant air.

Well, our world is peopled with empty spaces, with the shadows of bygone days, the ghosts of what has been, but can never, never be again.

I was almost more impressed than ever by this wonderful building. To-day, as I entered, a strange sight met my gaze. In the open space between the west doorway and the chancel sat an imposing Council. Behind a table, on which stood golden vessels and lighted candlesticks, on a throne sat the Bishop, gorgeous in scarlet robes and all the pomp and magnificence of ecclesiastical luxury. Jewels flashed from his hands, and his mitre encircled a broad white brow. His features were not distinguished by severity, but by a certain good-humoured ease, which told of a life without great emotions, of lines that had fallen in pleasant places, and would fain make them pleasant for others. Not a spiritual face by any means; but one that a burdened conscience might wish to confess to, quite certain that the rod of correction would never fall very heavily on the penitent shoulders.

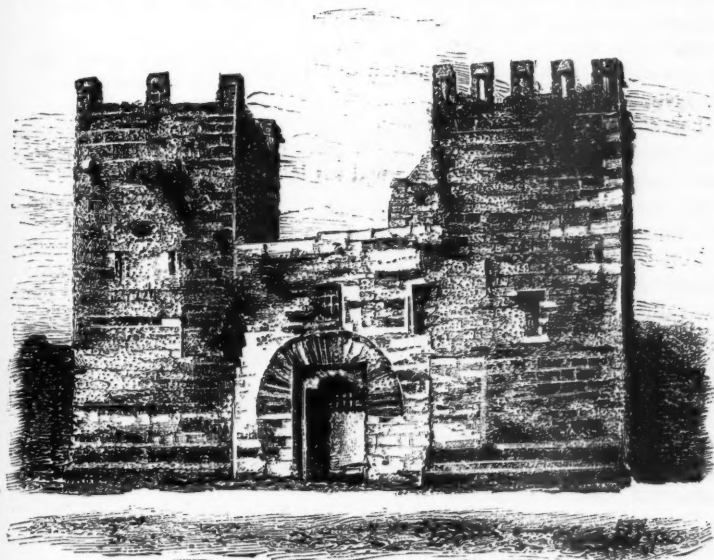
On his left stood a huge hour-glass, and the sand was falling, falling, falling; slowly but surely: reading a lesson that probably few in that crowd took to heart. To right and left of the Bishop, in front of him and on each side, forming a complete square, sat a conclave of canons and other church dignitaries, also in scarlet robes. Candles lighted up their faces with strange distinctness, throwing out into deeper, more intense gloom the surrounding aisles and arches.

From a temporary pulpit to the right of the Bishop, but at the further end of the square, a little man in black was holding forth. He was a barrister. His voice was loud, his gestures were animated, his purpose was evidently more secular than sacred. Sometimes in his animation he almost disappeared within the pulpit, to shoot up again like a Jack-in-the-box. Sometimes in his anxiety to impress his hearers he almost threw himself into the very midst of the Council.

But they were evidently used to this kind of thing. They were all perfectly calm and motionless. Not a muscle of their faces

moved, not an eye seemed to twinkle. In more than one case, indeed, the eyes were closed in what might have been taken for the sublimity of thought or the ecstasy of devotion, but was only the rhapsody of dreams. I cannot say much for many of the faces : they bore traces neither of intellect nor spirituality. One could only wonder how they had attained to the ecclesiastical dignity of a scarlet robe.

The reason for all this commotion was a simple one. A vacant canonry had to be filled up, and two divines put forth their claims to promotion. Each had his special pleader, and it was the business



GATE OF ALCUDIA.

of the pleader to prove his own cause the better, his own right the greater. No wonder that the Council took things so placidly. Of course they had made up their unprejudiced minds upon which of the two candidates the lot should fall.

The sands of the hour-glass drew to an end, and I watched more closely. The Bishop evidently watched also. As the last grains fell through ; in the very midst of a sentence in which the pleader seemed to be hurling anathemas at those whom he failed to convince ; the Bishop rose from his throne, the sentence was never finished, the Council broke up. The special pleader, in no wise disconcerted, came down from his elevation, mental and physical ; literally tumbled himself out of the pulpit ; and rapidly disappeared into the sombre depths of the cathedral.

The Council formed itself into a procession, in which the Bishop, with robes upheld, was the centre of attraction. As it seemed, not a bit cared he for robes and mitres, pomps and ceremonies, flashing jewels and the bowing down of the world. He put up with all this as a part of his office. His was a lordly and commanding form; portly with advancing years, and the good things of life. It is not always Friday.

The procession marched up the beautiful aisles and went forth into those rich and rare cloisters that I have already described to you. Then they entered a Sacristy or Chapter-house, and gathered round their Bishop. Words and sentences were exchanged, he smiled and laughed, looked very jolly and tolerant, at peace with all men, contented with his lot. Then they all, one after the other, kissed his jewelled fingers and he departed to his palace, escorted by two of the favoured dignitaries.

I went back into the cathedral. Lights were out, golden vessels had been removed, the hour glass was put away for another occasion; the benches on which the Council had sat looked empty and desolate. I tell you, my sister, that our world is peopled with empty spaces. All, all, passes away.

I was not sorry to leave Barcelona. Apart from its wonderful cathedral I do not very much care for the place. It is hot and enervating. Its climate is supposed to suit invalids. I had telegraphed to A. that I was coming by way of Alcudia, so that he might transfer his waiting from pier to platform. I should reach Palma by train, not by boat.

We started at four in the afternoon. The gorgeous sunset—the harbour of Barcelona is famous for its sunsets—flushed the water and gilded the distant hills, which faded away in a dreamy purple haze, inexpressibly beautiful.

The night passed. About three o'clock in the morning I was awakened by the steward muttering cabalistic words in an unknown tongue. He managed to make me understand that we had reached Alcudia. I replied that it was too early to turn out; I would do so about seven. Came the answer: Then they would have the honour of taking me on to Minorca.

This was startling, and you may be sure that I was very soon on deck. Minorca and Port Mahon had no present charms for me.

A splendid morning, but chilly, for the sun had not yet risen. It was that weird moment between the dawn and the daylight when we seem as it were to be hovering between two worlds. Few people ever see it, and, in spite of all that has been sung and said, I think they are best in bed and asleep. It is the most depressing time of the twenty-four hours.

We were in the Bay of Alcudia, but some distance from the shore. Low, undulating hills surrounded us. On one of them was an old watch-tower, dating back to the days of the Moors or the

Romans. Before us, quite far off, a small stone landing stage or breakwater formed a harbour and jutted out a hundred yards into the sea. A handful of houses on land looked desolate and deserted. From an open doorway or window gleamed a solitary light, as if to pilot one in the right direction. Overshadowing all was the grey melancholy tone of early morning.

I confess to feeling a little lost, simply because I could not understand these people. Here I was at the ends of the earth; in the most uncivilised portion of Mallorca. I was about to land alone: should be at the mercy of a people who might be angels in disguise; who might also be ruffians thirsting for my life. You know the silly old German saying: "Kann sein, kann auch nicht sein, kann doch sein!" But there was no help for it. A small boat was alongside in charge of an old fossil, and into this I must descend.

I looked around for my luggage. Not a sign or trace of anything was to be seen. At Barcelona it had been put into the hold, and I concluded that it was still there. I made signs. The captain, and the officers, and the stewards, and the men made signs in return. It was like a scene in a play. We were as good as semaphores, but much more ridiculous and energetic.

I pointed to the hold; they pointed to the boat; I looked down and saw nothing but the old fossil. I insisted upon going into the hold—what else could I do? Down we all went, a long procession, with lanterns, a great tramping of feet, a confusion of tongues. No sign of luggage. It must be under those bales and boxes at the further end. I gave up in despair, entered the small boat and departed. The whole ship's company looked over the sides with what my distorted imagination took to be a satanic grin of triumph, or scorn, or derision. It was nothing of the kind. It was an affectionate farewell.

Away we went. The old fossil rowed lustily. He was also singularly intelligent; we really conversed without speech. The steamer receded; Alcudia gained upon us. On reaching the landing pier, my sight was gladdened by an astonished view of my precious lares. How they arrived there remains a mystery to this day. I can only suppose that in Alcudia they possess an enchanted carpet.

Down came some officers to inspect the luggage. I assured them it contained nothing to eat—the chief thing on which one seems to pay duty in Mallorca. They were perfectly satisfied, presented arms (I don't know why they carried them, still less why they presented them), and we separated with delight. At least I bear witness to my own sensations.

We went up the pier and into the open house from which had gleamed the solitary light. It was a modest roadside sort of *cabaret*—we have hardly its equivalent in English. I entered a dirty room with a cold stone floor. Opening out of it was another and a darker and a dirtier room, into which I took care not to penetrate.

People were astir. There were loaves of coarse bread on a rough deal table, evidently meant to supply the little neighbourhood. On a bench against the whitewashed wall a man in uniform with a gun by his side—policeman, soldier, custom-house officer, I know not what—was taking his ease and drinking anisette. Whether this was his last draught for the night, or his first of the morning, I cannot say. He, too, was civil enough to present arms as I entered; I returned the attention with military salute, and we became excellent friends.

Enter a couple of ruffianly-looking men, and I was immediately dinned with what seemed to me one horrible incomprehensible word. This word was not ABRACADABRA: it was much worse. It sounded like KARRAWAKKY, pronounced with strong KS and RS, and deep seated vowels. The air seemed full of KARRAWAKKY: it flew about the room like sparks from an anvil: the two men hurled it at each other and shouted it at me. I thought they would have come to blows and bloodshed, and if the officer had not been propped so flat up against the wall, I should have got behind him for protection.

What could the men want? What was the meaning of the word KARRAWAKKY? Was it Alcudian for murder and sudden death? Had I been captured by brigands, was a price set upon my head, and would the English Government pay it? I trembled.

At this critical juncture enter the old fossil, and the scene changed.

He was evidently lord of the establishment. He too made use of the word karrawakky, but with him it had quite a new sound: came down, as it were, from small capitals to ordinary type. The two ruffians were turned out, and went on with their quarrel in the open air. He then made me understand that karrawakky was Mallorcan for conveyance, without which I could never reach the train that was to convey me to Palma. The two ruffians had rival karrawakkies, and therefore hated each other with an earnestness worthy of a better cause. I had a drive before me of about ten miles to the little town of La Puebla. The train started about eight o'clock.

Presently up came the conveyance of the country, a one-horse cart covered with a dome-shaped white awning. It was very much like a moving sarcophagus, inasmuch as that, once inside, you were immolated from the world: "lost to sight," to quote H. C., whom, just now, in my solitude, I missed more than ever: shielded from the gaze of the curious—the very curious of Alcudia.

After a cup of coffee, much needed, as you may suppose, after all these thrilling adventures at three in the morning, the work of immolation began. I climbed into the cart on one side, the driver climbed into the cart on the other side. There was just room for two, and thus we journeyed. He was a tall, thin, grave, quiet-looking man of about twenty-four, dressed in light clothes, which gave him the appearance of a miller, and he never opened his mouth during the whole journey.

We entered into the town of Alcudia, which lies at a little distance from the bay. It is the oldest portion of Mallorca, and retains many traces of its antiquity. Little as I yet know of it, I can see that it is one of the most interesting old places in existence.

A large ancient gateway admitted us within the precincts. Alcudia has a true Oriental aspect, and is surrounded by a double set of



THE OLD MOORISH FOUNTAIN.

walls: Roman and Mediæval. A curious amber tone, beautiful and picturesque, overshadows the whole place. The town lies in a plain. On one side it yields to long stretches of shore, and the soft-flowing waters of the Mediterranean; everywhere else the prospect is bounded by long chains of low, undulating hills. I praise the town of Alcudia; its old-world influence; but from all I hear it is impossible to praise its people.

In the narrowest of streets we drew up at the inn for the purpose of changing horses. The animal was taken out of the shafts, which

were lowered without ceremony, and I was left uncomfortably suspended between earth and heaven at an angle of 45 degrees. Bailie Nicol Jarvie, hanging from the rock by his plaid, could scarcely have felt in greater jeopardy.

I clutched at the roof, the sides, the seat, anything that came first. The people of Alcudia, looking upon me as public property and lawful game, unable to gratify their curiosity in any other way, came and thrust their faces into the cart. I would have given anything for a wild bear to terrify them into a respectful distance, or a Flibbertigibbet to plunge them into a swoon; but at three in the morning (it was nearer five now) one's nervous force is at a low ebb, and we take things quietly.

After long waiting the new horse came round, the cart was tilted up with an abruptness which sent me backwards, the small crowd scattered, and we once more set out. I could keep up no manner of conversation with the driver. Words we had not, and he was not given to signs. I wondered whether he was mute.

In due time the quaint and quiet little town of La Puebla declared itself, with its old church tower rising above the flat-roofed houses. We passed the melancholy cemetery—all the cemeteries are melancholy in Mallorca—with its imposing little entrance and its catacomb-walls, and soon after drew up at the station.

The train left at five minutes to eight, and I entered upon the last stage of my journey.

Soon I found myself once more on old familiar lines: the junction for Manacor, whither, you will remember, we went when we visited the Caves of Arta. I thought of the rattling old omnibus that had nearly cost us our lives; of the quaint old Manacor inn, and the Manacor mosquitoes that had played such havoc with H. C.: and of the procession, headed by the landlady and brought up by the cook, that had escorted us to the door of the hotel on our return to Palma. How well I remembered all the old landmarks!

Palma at last; Palma once more; dear old Palma de Mallorca. And on the platform A. waiting for me: the pleasantest sight I had seen since parting from you on the banks of the Thames.

We were soon on the wing. Outside the station, our old driver Paolo—not in command of the lordly barouche, but with an ordinary Karrawakky—recognised me with solemn delight, and cracked his whip in honour of the occasion. A few moments after we had reached A's. abode, and I felt myself at home.

Not that I am now in Palma at all under the old conditions of my winter visit. Then I had to put up with the fonda: the best that Palma could produce certainly, but still a fonda. Now I am in a palace, and I feel that if royal blood does not run in my veins, it is merely the result of accident.

For A., who has been in Mallorca ever since we crossed over

together last November, has taken this old palace in the very heart of Palma, where he intends to remain until he departs hence.

And as we entered Palma together so we shall probably leave it together by and by. In fact he has already proposed that we should go out and climb the Himalayas—for which he considers my excursion to the Puig Major has qualified me in an especial manner. Have I your permission to roam with him India's coral strands? I warn you that he will immediately after propose an expedition to Greenland's icy mountains. We shall probably return at the end of five years, bronzed and bearded bipeds, with nerves and livers.

He has courage and energy: has not only taken this old palace, but furnished it; and with the best *cordon bleu* that Palma will produce, and with James for a valet—who to me has been worth his weight in gold ever since he helped me down the Puig Major, when I was basely deserted by A. and rendered desperate by H. C.—he is surrounded by all the good things of life, and is in a state of serene happiness. As I shall now come in for a share of all this serenity in addition to A.'s companionship, you will feel that I also am to be envied.

This palace is an old building, very typical of Palma. It is in a narrow street, which, in the early morning especially, rings with the cries of street hawkers: water-carriers, fruit-sellers, &c. The earliest and most unearthly sound is that of the dustman—if I am not mistaken in the gentleman's occupation. He invariably wakes one out of the last and best sleep, and is not blessed in consequence.

Extremes meet; and so, opposite our windows, there flourishes a blacksmith's forge. It might be worse. There is always something picturesque and interesting in a forge. The sound of the anvil is almost musical; and I have never seen anything singular, or incongruous, or out of place, or far-fetched, in the idea of Handel's Harmonious Blacksmith. On the contrary, the great composer felt a certain truth—and see how the theme inspired him.

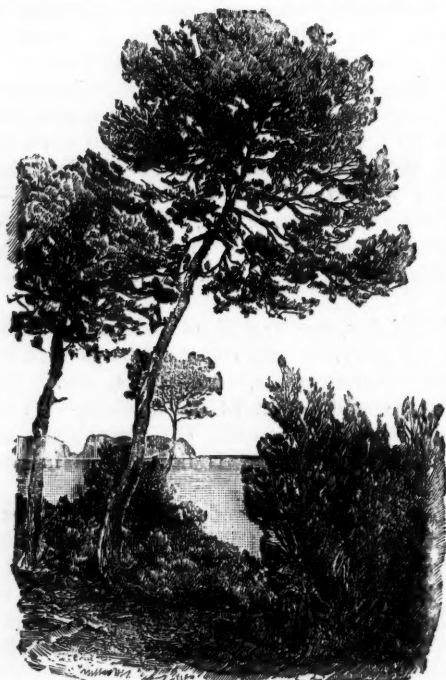
The sparks flying upwards, too, read their lesson, and remind us that man is born to trouble. A blacksmith might well be a philosopher also.

Our blacksmith here is an interesting example of his profession. He is stalwart. His face is always black and his teeth are white. If we happen to be looking out of window, and he happens to be looking up, he touches his cap and gives us a nod and a grin, and a friendly feeling is established. This is not meant for familiarity. In his eyes, we are only a little below monarchy.

I told you that extremes meet, and next door to the blacksmith comes another palace. The blinds are kept very much down, but the windows are ever open, and there often issue forth sounds that are really musical; a brilliantly-touched piano, and a voice of sweet and sympathetic quality. The songs are all love songs. Need I tell

you who inspires them? Who but the faithless A. whom we last left taking Mallorcan lessons from Rosita in Soller, and who is now quite ready to receive the homage of love songs in Palma. Alas, for human nature.

The first day a lovely pair of love-lit eyes came to the window, and the blind was drawn aside by a snow white hand; a hand made for romance. Its owner was the possessor of the sympathetic voice.



STILL WATERS.

But as soon as the eyes caught sight of two heads instead of one, they retreated like a frightened fawn, and melancholy fell upon A.

Then, by means of an invisible gold thread running between the windows, like a lovers' electric telegraph, he sent over a billet doux sprinkled with otto of roses, in which he informed the sweet singer that I was in his confidence and she had nothing to fear. In fact, he added, I understood very little about love and romance, and all that sort of thing, but passed my life dreaming over the dry bones of metaphysics and translating rhymes from the Hebrew.

"She is very beautiful," he murmured to me, when the missive had been appropriated by the delicate hand of the unseen fairy. "I think I shall marry her. She is noble as well as beautiful, you know. Will you be my best man?"

I took time to consider, as the judges sometimes say in a difficult case.

Shall I describe our palace to you?

A. has furnished it with a severe simplicity that is very charming. You are not for ever knocking down occasional tables and breaking your legs in the dark by falling over impossible chairs. The floors and walls are of stone. The rooms are immense, and echo to the sound of our voices. The walls are decorated with lovely

Spanish fans, old pieces of damask of rare workmanship, beautiful Majolica plates, charming water-colour sketches of captivating Spanish women.

His own special room is adorned with classical pillars, surmounted by the heads and busts of two black ladies. Upon these his eyes first rest on awaking in the morning, and they fill him with sublime visions of the ancient days of Rome and Greece. He becomes quite classical and historical, and at breakfast we go through all the merits of the Cæsars, all the deeds of the Triumvirate, whilst Catalina every now and then comes in like a Greek Chorus, with her everlasting solicitude for our welfare. Catalina is our *cordón bleu*.

These black ladies, A. tells me, are Cleopatra the First and Cleopatra the Second. I don't know; I never heard of Cleopatra the Second. But A. declares that she had an actual existence. Perhaps she had. I believe everything I am told.

Our dining-room is oval, and the walls are lined with cabinets of ancient and curious glass; gems that A. has picked up in this old Palma de Mallorca. He is a great authority in these matters, and I am not; so I sit at the feet of my Gamaliel, and receive instruction. He has not yet followed the Spanish custom of placing his whole house at my disposal. I hope he won't. I should never follow the Spanish custom of returning all these old specimens. Could I be expected to do so?

This oval dining-room is our smallest but most curious and uncommon apartment. Here we breakfast every morning upon delicious ensaimadas. They are neither cake, pastry, nor bread, but a sort of elegant and refined combination of all three. When we first



REBECCA AT THE WELL.

had them at the Fonda de Mallorca, we despised them; now I consider them worth their weight in gold. Lest you should think this an exaggeration, I must add that they are light enough to be blown away by a zephyr. A. swears by them and dreams of them. Fortunately he is not all Roman history and mythology, but, like myself, has little human weaknesses which make him interesting and companionable.

A. takes his chocolate out of small cups without handles, and I take my tea or coffee out of the same—I mean a similar cup, of course. It is clear that we could not both take coffee and chocolate out of the same cup at the same time. We have no cups with handles here. It is charmingly primitive, and takes us back to the days of Dr. Johnson and Mrs. Thrale, hoops and patches and powder, when people drank tea out of saucers and prided themselves on a particular curl of their little finger.

Here we have no saucers; they are not the fashion, and we follow the fashion. We have plates instead. The first morning, charmed with the idea, and wishing to carry out to the letter the times and customs of Dr. Johnson and Mesdames Thrale, Piozzi et Compagnie, I poured my tea into the plate. Unfortunately it was shallow, and in raising it to my lips, whilst endeavouring to give the right curl to my little finger it all upset on the further side, like a miniature Niagara. A curious word escaped A.—a twinge in a favourite corn, he explained—and the Greek Chorus appeared on the scene: this time with a variation.

For the future I intend to be content with modern customs, and shall leave Dr. Johnson and his attendant shades to their repose.

Catalina, our *cordon bleu* and Greek Chorus, is a tall, thin, rather refined-looking woman, with a sad-toned voice and a countenance to correspond. She has seen better days. Her father was a landed proprietor, and Catalina never expected to go out to service. But she has a husband who considers that to overwork is to wear himself out before his time; and she has a swarm of children; and if he will not earn their bread and butter, why she must. She does it bravely, and he scruples not to take of the frugal fare provided by her industry.

Have you ever watched an old hen and her brood when food is thrown down to them? How she looks on and urges her willing offsprings to great efforts in eating, and never touches anything herself until she considers that they have had enough and to spare? That old hen has far more Christian principle about her than Catalina's lord and master. Nevertheless she is inordinately proud of him, and has begged the favour of having his photograph taken.

I have brought over, this time, in addition to an ordinary camera, a small instantaneous detective machine. A. has taken this under his own charge, and it yields us great amusement. None know that they are being taken until the thing is done. Then, if they happen

to notice the camera pointed at them, they start as if it were a gun, and they themselves under fire. All yesterday morning we went about the quaint old streets of Palma, and in and out of the beautiful old courts, and took every interesting subject and every group that crossed our path. Some I enclose to you. One reminds us of Marie Antoinette, and is a good type of a Palma girl. A. calls her Rebecca at the well. She holds her classical pitcher, which she has just filled with water, and is evidently waiting for Isaac to escort her home. I had great difficulty in persuading A. that his name was not Isaac.

The success of this little machine is perfect, and works so instantaneously that our groups are full of dramatic action. We see them actually, as it were, in motion—almost hear the sound of their footfall.

To-day has been spent very differently. We have been out on the water, the blue flashing waters of the Mediterranean. We left quite early this morning on an excursion to a distant shore to pick up shells for A.'s garden.

We started in A.'s boat, and with A.'s old boatman and a boy. James took special charge of a luncheon-basket groaning with good things: festival baked meats prepared by our Greek Chorus.

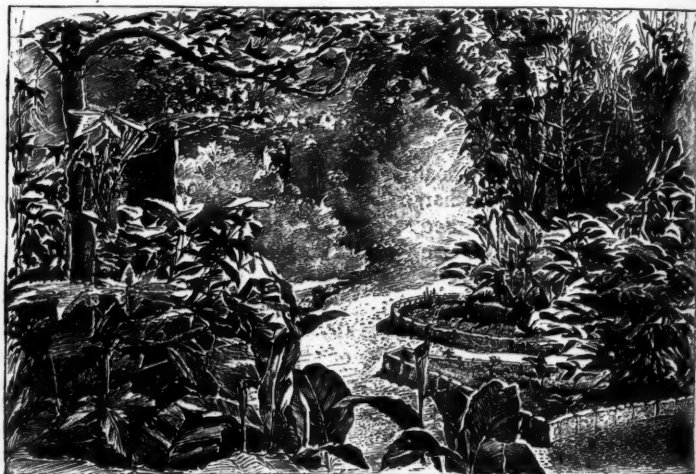
I should like you to see the old boatman. He has a head and face that would do honour to a three-decker as its figurehead; a mouth that is like nothing except the entrance to the caves of Arta; a voice that would do credit to Vulcan in the midst of his forge, and would be heard above the raging of his fiery furnace, the roar of his anvil, the thunder of his bolts; a laugh—but I cannot describe to you his laugh. It is thunder and lightning all mixed up and blended into one, appalling in its effects. He sends one into convulsions: and every time he speaks or laughs I do not know whether the thrill that passes through me is most of mirth or terror.

It was a very lovely morning. The sea flashed its jewels around us. The sun poured down upon us with intense heat. A golden haze for a time enveloped us. I have told you that we live here in a rainbow atmosphere. We are steeped in Eastern glamour and Oriental magnificence. We are in Dreamland, Fairyland, the Valley of Diamonds, the regions of Aladdin. Imagination rejoices, and steeps one in an existence wherein all else is forgotten; all the outer world; everything but the present scene and hour. A. is at the helm, full of dreamy conversation. I am stretched at his feet in the bottom of the boat, dreaming also, lotus-eating, gazing at that wonderful sky above us, listening to A.'s periods, full of romance and poetic prose; wondering if this existence will last for ever; if it be true that there is an outside world whose prose, alas, knows nothing of poetry; where all is cold and hard, and full of sorrow and sighing; where our steps are haunted by the spectres of sin and error, duties neglected, and things that can never be recalled.

Tangled threads, my sister, are our lives, and well for us if a wiser Hand than ours shall unravel them at the last.

And every now and then, startling one like a thunderclap in a clear sky, comes the voice and the laughter of our Vulcan of a boatman.

We reached our destination, and landed with difficulty. The rocks were steep and slippery, and the blue waters, calm though they are, plashed and dashed at their base. On the greensward beyond, James spread our luncheon, and we were as happy as the Gods on Olympus, and quite as well provided with nectar and ambrosia. The old boatman and the boy went off, and presently



IN OUR GARDEN.

returned staggering under huge sacks of shells that I could not have lifted for a king's ransom.

A fair wind wafted us back to Palma in the afternoon, when the sun had passed the zenith and the shadows began to decline. We returned wrapped in that dreamy languor, which is not fatigue, but a blissful state of existence only possible in these latitudes, and from which one would almost like never to awaken.

But as the shades of evening fell, we awoke to realities and Catalina's chefs-d'œuvre. After which we went as usual and reclined in the most luxurious of chairs, in A.'s garden.

It is a very picturesque garden, gorgeous with beautiful blooms and overshadowing trees. We are surrounded by houses and neighbours. In one room there are fifty millinery girls all hard at work. If A. calls to Catalina, at once the fifty heads are thrust out at the window, and fifty voices all scream out to know which

Catalina is in demand. But A., who is extremely particular and circumspect, pays no attention. He always sits with his back turned to this window.

Everyone here seems to be christened Catalina. It is the name of a patron saint, and no doubt is supposed to charm away misfortunes and evil spirits—like the gargoyles of antiquity. I fear the charm is only too often ineffectual.

The air is full of Catalinas. You cannot go out into the streets but you hear Catalina shrieked on every side: and Catalina! Catalina! is the burden of every song.

Into this garden of A.'s, James brings us coffee. The shades of night have fallen, and we take it in faith—we cannot see it. The cups are, of course, handleless, and we are reminded of a bygone era, and drift insensibly into old-world talk of people and places, manners and customs, which have passed away almost beyond the power of realisation.

We sit and talk and dream, and the moments glide insensibly into hours. A damp and chilly feeling creeps into the air: a strange mist or miasma seems to rise out of the earth. Night after night we go in, cold and wet—in this hot climate—with a curious sensation in one's limbs, as if circulation had suspended itself.

I am convinced there is danger in this night air. I believe that even death may lurk in its subtle influence. I tell A. so, but he only laughs at me, and I, weakly sensitive to ridicule, pass it over. Nevertheless, to-night I feel that something is about to happen. I shiver as we rise from our easy chairs, and ache in every limb.

It all passes off as I sit writing to you at my little table, burning the midnight oil. A. has long since retired to repose, and is no doubt dreaming of ensaimadas, which he is sharing with Cleopatra the First and Cleopatra the Second. Every now and then the old Palma watchman passes up and down the narrow street, flooding it with pale uncertain light. I have grown used to Il Sereno, and greet him as an old friend. As he was in winter, so is he in summer, even to his cloak, which is not discarded. At this very moment of writing, his footsteps are growing faint in the distance, and his voice is dying upon the air. Once more he seems to say: "The night cometh." But the sequel—"and also the morning"—finds no echo in my heart. To me it seems always Night.



THE CHÂTEAU DE KERONEL.

A TRUE STORY.

MY name is Jane Wilson, my age forty-five, and my life, until the strange and terrible experience of two years ago, which I am about to relate, has been as peaceful and prosaic a one as can well be imagined. I am a spinster, but that fate having been predicted for me from my earliest youth, I was resigned to it in anticipation and have not found it unbearable in reality.

For my sister Mary, on the contrary, with her rare beauty and sweet disposition, a great career was prophesied, and when she closed a brilliant girlhood by making an even "finer match" than we anticipated, no one was more proud and pleased than I.

I lived on quietly with my father (we had lost our mother soon after my birth) until his death, which occurred when I was about thirty years of age.

My sister was then anxious that I should reside with her for the future, and her husband, Sir George Manvers, seconded her invitation. But I clung to my independence, and stayed on in the old house alone. Every Christmas I spent with the Manvers at Daintree; and occasionally my nieces, Madge and Nellie, and their brother Harry, would spend a month with me, and then the old rooms would re-echo with the sound of their merry young voices, which to me, who never seemed to have had any youth of my own, was the sweetest of music.

The two girls were very different—Madge, the elder, a bright, handsome brunette with laughing eyes and frolicsome ways; Nellie, a lovely blonde, serious, dreamy and romantic. She and Harry were twins, and her devotion to him amounted to worship, although it was Madge who entered into all his amusements, and was his aider and abettor in all his schemes of boyish mischief.

He was the type of what a boy should be; manly, generous, high spirited; the pride and darling, not only of his mother, but of his less demonstrative father, who built high hopes upon him: hopes alas! never destined to be realised.

He was travelling on the continent with his tutor when suddenly, without any warning, the blow fell. "In Vienna's fatal walls, God's finger touched him, and he slept." A telegram had come announcing his illness; then, within half-an-hour, before his parents could start to go to him, another saying that all was over.

I pass over the misery of the next few months. The sorrow of all was deep and lasting, but on none did it tell so heavily as on poor little Nellie, who fell into a state of settled melancholy from which it was impossible to rouse her.

I had been summoned to Daintree at the first and remained on from month to month at Sir George's earnest request, to be of what comfort and help I could to Mary, whose health, never very strong, was sadly impaired by grief and anxiety.

Altogether, it was a trying winter, and when in spring they moved up to town for the session, I was not sorry to return for a while to the rest and quiet of my own home, in which, however, I was not to be left for long. Early in August, I had a letter from Madge, telling me that, having been advised to try what complete change of scene would do for Nellie, they had decided on spending the autumn in Brittany, and were all anxious that I should accompany them.—“Do come, dear Auntie,” she wrote. “Mamma is no stronger than when you last saw her, and it will be such a comfort to have you.”

I was not likely to refuse such an invitation. I loved my sister dearly, and was glad to feel that she turned to me in her trouble. The idea of a tour in Brittany, also, had great attractions for me, and under brighter circumstances would have been altogether delightful. My preparations were soon made, and I joined the Manvers in Eaton Square on the day before that fixed for our start.

Here I found that the plans had undergone some modification.

Sir George's parliamentary duties would detain him in London for another three weeks, but as it was not thought advisable to delay our departure, we were to make straight for M.—, in lower Brittany, there take a furnished house, and await his coming. Meantime, on *me* were to devolve the duties of leader of the expedition.

More than once during that evening when I looked at Mary and marked the sad change for the worse a few short months had made in her appearance, my heart sank, and I would fain have drawn back from the charge I had undertaken. But I stifled my misgivings; and next day we started from Southampton, en route for St. Malo.

We had a quick and smooth passage; daybreak saw us at the entrance to the bay, and Madge and I went on deck to enjoy the prospect, leaving the others still sleeping below.

Before us rose the grey old walls and spires of St. Malo; to our left those of St. Servan; while further away lay the more modern watering-place of Dinard, its gay villas dotted along the shore and crowning every little eminence. Across the sands moved strange, bare-legged figures of men and women with creels slung over their shoulders, and in their hands long spades or nets with which they dug for sand-ells or fished for shrimps in the shallow pools left by the receding tide. The eastern sky was tinged with a rosy radiance.

At this moment Nellie crept up from the cabin. The change from its gloom to the brilliancy above must have been great indeed, and, roused for an instant from her usual apathy, she pointed to the east and quoted softly: “The golden gates of heaven are opening wide.”

"Yes," exclaimed Madge, throwing her arms round her sister. "And oh, Nellie darling, what radiancy of glory—what bliss beyond compare must lie within!"

Anything in the way of sentiment seemed generally so remote from Madge that I looked at her in startled surprise, and was struck almost painfully by the strange, eager longing of the gaze with which she was contemplating the sky. It was as if in imagination she was already within those "golden gates." But the glow faded from the horizon; with it the rapt expression left her eyes, and, saying hastily that she must "see after mamma," she left the deck.

By this time we had anchored, and all was bustle and confusion.

We travelled luxuriously, with a whole suit of servants, among whom was a French maid. So we were spared the worry of the douane, and, leaving them to squabble with the Custom House officials, drove off at once to the hotel.

Passing under a great stone archway, our carriage rattled through several narrow, stone-paved streets, and drew up at a small doorway, where we alighted, and were admitted into an inner court, round three sides of which the inn was built. We were pleased with everything: from the old-fashioned welcome of the kindly hostess, and her smiling, quaint-capped bonnes, to the steaming and delicious café-au-lait and long crisp rolls with which we were presently refreshed.

I saw nothing of the town, however, to my great regret, for soon after our arrival Mary terrified me by a fainting fit. And though she soon recovered and assured me that there was no cause for alarm, as these things had become matters of common occurrence with her, I could not make up my mind to go out and leave her.

Next morning, we made an early start, and before evening were installed in the "Hotel de l'Europe" at M. A noisy, bustling, crowded inn it proved to be, more showy but far less comfortable than the homely inn we had just left. Mary took a dislike to it on the spot, and declared that we must lose no time in finding a house. So directly after breakfast in the morning Madge and I went off in quest of one; with instructions that, if possible, it was to be outside the town, which at this season of the year was over-run by British tourists of the usual obnoxious type.

We visited two or three house-agents, but heard of nothing likely to suit our purpose. Were almost in despair when Madge's eye was caught by an advertisement of a "Château à Louer, three miles from M., well-furnished, commanding magnificent views, with fine gardens, orchards, &c.," which she at once pronounced to be "the very thing," as there was a romantic sound about it which would be certain to please Nellie.

The advertisement referred us for all particulars to Mons. Morny, banker, on whom we happened to have a letter of credit, and we

sallied forth once more to deliver the letter and hear what he had to tell us.

A most agreeable and polite person was Monsieur Morny. He assured us that we were fortunate in having the chance of securing such a residence as the Château des Tourelles, which was a house "comme il y en avait peu." It belonged to the Comte de Keronel who generally lived in it himself, but, being obliged to spend some time in Paris, wished to let it during his absence. Should we decide on taking it we could enter immediately, and the rent was wonderfully moderate: though as to that, indeed, Sir George had given *carte-blanche*.

So far, so good, and we took leave of our smiling, bowing friend, promising to see the château on the following day and let him know the result.

Next morning we hired a carriage and all started together on a visit of inspection.

We were soon clear of the town, and after driving for about half-an-hour a sudden bend of the road brought us in sight of an imposing, turretted edifice, which our driver pointed out to us as "Les Tourelles." It lay to our left, and was built on the very edge of the table-land, which thence sloped gradually to the river, and from a wide arched doorway in the base of the château a road ran down this slope and was lost to view some fifty feet below us. It led, we were told, to the lower town (M. is divided into a Haute and a Basse-ville) and was formerly the principal approach to Les Tourelles, but the road on which we were would bring us to the upper entrance of the castle, which was the only one now used.

As the driver finished this explanation, we turned into an avenue, fully half a mile long, of magnificent Spanish chestnuts. At the end of this a handsome gateway gave admittance to a large gravelled court, and we drew up before a double flight of steps, at the top of which stood a little wizened, witch-like old woman, with a shrivelled apple complexion, bright, dark piercing eyes, and clad in a striped stuff gown with high white cap and muslin kerchief folded across her bosom.

This was the "gardienne" of the place, who, having been warned by Monsieur Morny of our coming, now invited us to enter, assuring us that we should find everything ready for inspection within.

This floor was devoted to reception rooms opening from the central hall. A handsome dining-room, oak panelled and oak furnished library and smoking-room, boudoir in the florid style, all cupids and rose buds, finally a really charming drawing-room with painted ceiling and many mirrors, but otherwise furnished in modern fashion with absolutely comfortable-looking chairs and sofas, the first we had seen since leaving home.

This room had five long windows opening on to a wide balcony

with steps leading to the garden below, which was laid out in terraces, and, with its trim pastures, clipped yews, fountains and statues, was, as Madge remarked, "Quite like a thing in a book."

With a sigh of intense satisfaction Nellie opened a window, stepped out, and was soon pacing up and down the stately terraces like the heroine of romance she no doubt felt herself to be.

Leaving her to this enjoyment we proceeded to visit the bedrooms, which were large, airy, cheerful, and more than sufficiently numerous. The views from all the windows, both above and below, were lovely. More and more charmed with this delightful château, we descended again to the dining-room, where Mary said she would rest, and I was left to inspect the basement, while Madge joined her sister in the garden.

Mariette Hervé, the old gardienne, led the way through a door in one corner of the entrance hall, and I followed down a winding stone staircase into a long vaulted apartment, dimly lighted by high narrow windows, into each of which a stone cross was built. At some remote period it had probably been used as a chapel, but on this point my guide could give me no information.

"It might be so—she could not tell—in the old days folks were more 'devote' than now—but in the time of her father it had been the entrance hall of the castle. And that," pointing to the heavy oaken brass-clamped door: the same, of course, that we had seen from the carriage, "was the entrance door and stood always open."

"And why," I asked, "should it not stand open now?"

"Times were changed," was the reply. "Now that all the best hotels and shops were in the Haute-ville, the Basse-ville had fallen into disrepute, and there was no coming and going between it and the castle. But every de Keronel had to travel the road to the old town once, for all that," she added with a malicious chuckle.

"How so?" I asked.

"The day of their burial, my good lady," laughed the old crone. "That road leads to the cemetery in the old town, where all the Keronels are buried, and every one of them must be carried out of that door feet-foremost one day. The last to go was the present Count's father. That was five years ago, and the door has been closed ever since. But I daresay I shall live to see it open once more," and she chuckled again and rubbed her skinny hands together.

She was an uncanny old body, and I regarded her with strong disfavour, which perhaps noticing, she changed her tone, and remarking that I had still to see the rest of the premises, opened a side-door and motioned me forward.

It was a relief to escape from the atmosphere of that eerie hall. I followed my guide into a spacious, well-lighted kitchen, through various offices, cellars and out-buildings, and finally rejoined my sister;

who, on hearing that all was satisfactory, determined to take the château without delay.

We set out on the return drive, well pleased with our morning's work. Madge climbed on the box beside the driver, with whom she at once began an animated conversation. Mary and Nellie leaned back in their respective corners, and closed their eyes.

Seated with my back to the horses, I was looking idly before me when the château came again in view, and I started up scarce able to believe the evidence of my senses.

From the great door, wide open now, a long, dark line of figures was slowly issuing forth. A row of black-robed priests, a coffin borne aloft, with sable pall—then a long, long train of mourners.

Even as I gazed, the door closed on the last of these, and solemnly, mournfully, the procession filed down the hill, and wound its way along the road beneath us, while I followed its course with straining eyes, and such a fear and dread took possession of my heart that with difficulty I restrained myself from crying aloud "Look there ! it is an omen ! have nothing to do with the house from which it comes."

In another moment our road curved again, and the whole scene vanished from my sight.

Breathless, trembling, utterly unnerved, I sank back in my seat. Madge was still chattering to her companion on the box, Mary and Nellie still slumbering peacefully—they, evidently, had noticed nothing. Had I, too, been sleeping, and was what I had seen but "the baseless fabric of a dream ?"

Fain would I have thought so. But no ! I had been in full possession of my waking senses ; of that I was all too certain. How, then, account for what I had beheld ? Only a bare ten minutes before, we had left the château untenanted, save by the ancient gardienne ; we had seen no other creature within its precincts, every corner of which we had explored. How had it been possible in so short an interval, to assemble the numbers who had swelled that funeral train ? The priests—the corpse—where had they been concealed ?

Suddenly I remembered that we had not entered Mariette's house in the courtyard, and at the same moment the recollections of her words flashed across me, "that no doubt she should live to see the long-closed door open again !"

Here, then, was the solution of the mystery, about which I had been making myself so miserable. Some friend or relative of Mariette's had died, and was to be buried that morning. Warned of our coming, however, and not wishing to create a sad impression, which might interfere with our taking the château, she had contrived to postpone the setting out of the funeral procession, until we should have taken our departure, meantime all preparations for it were carefully hidden away in her own little house.

Eagerly I seized on this explanation, and desperately I clung to it, determinedly ignoring its many weak points, and taking myself to task as a superstitious old fool, for having allowed anything so simple to perplex me for an instant. Monsieur Morny would no doubt explain the matter to me.

Volunteering to convey to him my sister's decision to become the tenant of Les Tourelles, to Monsieur Morny accordingly I betook myself, after luncheon, and proceeded to pour forth my tale.

The banker listened, at first with amazement, then with growing incredulity, and when I had finished he gravely assured me that what I had been relating was a simple impossibility. Where could such a concourse of people as I had described have been concealed? Certainly not in Mariette's little house in which there was barely room to swing a cat.

And was it reasonable to suppose that an old woman of that class should have had such an idea as to conceal them with a view to sparing our feelings? Or that the priests would have lent themselves to such a deception?

He spoke in a persuasive, soothing tone. Evidently it was doubtful whether he considered me most fool or madwoman. Too much agitated to resent this, as I might have done at another time, I asked him how he, then, accounted for what I had seen.

"I think, Madame," was the reply with a smile, "it is probable, that overpowered by the heat, you slept like your companions and had a dream."

"But I tell you," I cried indignantly, "I was not dreaming! I was wide awake, and as plainly as I now see you I saw a funeral come out from the very door that Mariette had just before told me had not been opened since the late Count's funeral!"

"There!" he rejoined triumphantly, "is not that confirmation of my theory? You fell asleep, your mind running on Mariette's words. What more natural than that they should colour your dreams? Besides," he added, "the question is easily settled; one of my clerks lives close to Les Tourelles; we will ask him whether there has been any death in the neighbourhood." And ringing the bell he summoned the clerk.

"No; there had been no death; never indeed had the Commune been more healthy."

There was nothing left but for me to confess that Monsieur Morny was in the right and to beg him to keep my communication a secret, as Lady Manvers and my nieces were nervous and impressionable.

He looked as if he thought they had not a monopoly of these failings, but promised discretion, and ushered me politely to the door, saying he would call in the course of the evening with a copy of the lease, and that there would be nothing to prevent Lady Manvers from moving into Les Tourelles the very next day, should she wish to do so.

On my return to the hotel, I found Mary and the girls eager to take possession of their new abode, and delighted to hear that they could do so without delay. The terms of the lease brought by M. Morny were agreed to without demur; a cook and a couple of stalwart *bonnes* for house-work were engaged on the recommendation of the landlady, who also undertook to furnish us with carriage, horses and coachman. By the time we retired for the night our preparations were nearly completed. The die was cast. It was too late now for retreat, and long did I lie awake in the silent watches of the night, striving to pierce the unknown future, and wondering doubtfully whether I had done well to be silent.

Next evening saw us once more en route for Les Tourelles, whither the servants and luggage had preceded us some hours before, that all might be in readiness for our coming.

A weight of gloom which I vainly endeavoured to shake off had hung over my spirits all day, and as our carriage approached the curve in the road I strove to close my eyes. But an impulse which I was powerless to resist seemed to chain them open, and to turn them in the direction of the château. Ah! Merciful powers! Again the great door opened wide! Again the long dark train of mourners issued slowly forth! The sight was too much for my already overwrought nerves, and for the first time in my life I swooned away.

When I came to myself we were already turning into the court, and Mary and my nieces were bending anxiously over me. They insisted on my being carried into the house, where I was laid on the most comfortable sofa in the drawing-room, and all busied themselves in bringing remedies, bathing my forehead with *eau-de-cologne*, placing cushions for my head, etc. "We have worked you to death, poor dear," said Madge; "and now you must just lie still and be coddled, and leave us to look after ourselves."

Evidently no one had the slightest idea of the real cause of my swoon. To me alone had the vision been sent! Ah! how fervently I hoped that over me alone hung the fate it seemed to predict.

When I awoke next morning the sun was shining gaily in at the window and the maid was standing at my bedside with a cup of tea.

Recollection soon came back to me, but refreshed and strengthened by the night's rest I had more courage to face it. What evil that ghostly vision might portend I knew not, but if it threatened any of my dear ones, might not the fact that the warning had been sent to me prove that in my hands lay the power to avert the evil? There was comfort in this thought. Earnestly I resolved that if the most ceaseless care and watching on my part could avail aught, they should not be wanting. With these resolutions I descended to the breakfast-room.

The next few days were spent in settling down comfortably into our new domain and in exploring the neighbourhood.

The improvement in Nellie was most marked, and the look of

happiness which this brought to poor Mary's face made her appear better also. Once or twice, indeed, she again alarmed me by sudden attacks of faintness, but on each occasion these attacks were accounted for by a little over-fatigue, and I allowed myself to be persuaded that there was nothing really wrong. In another week, too, Sir George was to join us, and my responsibilities would be at an end.

It must not be supposed that I had forgotten the warning I had received.

During our first days at Les Tourelles it had been constantly in my mind. I had even visited old Mariette, and had sounded her cautiously as to any legends of the de Keronels which might throw light upon it. But she knew of none, or, if she did, would not communicate them; and as time went on and nothing happened, the recollection of what I had seen grew less vivid.

One night I woke suddenly from a sound sleep, with an unaccountable sensation of fear and dread. My room communicated with my sister's by a door which was always left open, and it seemed to me that as I woke *something* glided from my bedside and passed through this door.

Still, with that awful, paralyzing horror upon me, I lay almost gasping for breath, when of a sudden from Mary's room rang out an agonising scream. In an instant I was beside her. She stood in the middle of the floor, the moonbeams falling full upon her, her eyes staring, an expression of wild terror on her face. As I entered, again that nameless something seemed to flit past me, and, pointing in the direction it took: "There! There!" shrieked Mary, and fell down at my feet.

By this time all the household had collected. The girls had come running in at the first alarm. We raised her and did what we could to restore consciousness, but it was of no use; life had fled with that last cry. The doctor, who was summoned in haste, told us that she had heart complaint, and that death had been hanging over her for months. What she had seen at the last to accelerate it we shall never know in this world.

All our cares were now required for Nellie, who, on realising that her mother was really gone from us, fell into strong convulsions, and before Sir George's arrival was in a raging brain-fever. For weeks she hung between life and death; then youth conquered, and slowly she began to struggle back to health.

As her convalescence advanced, I was glad, however, to see that she showed no symptoms of relapsing into the morbid melancholy which had followed on her first bereavement. She sorrowed, indeed, but with a more chastened sorrow: no longer as one "who knew no hope."

It was Madge who first drew my attention to this change in Nellie. During all this sad time it would be impossible to describe what Madge had been to us; to her father, the sweetest, tenderest, most

sympathetic of daughters; to me, the most loving and helpful of companions, while to her sister she was so unwearied and skilful a nurse that the sick girl could scarcely endure her to be away from her side for a moment.

Dear, bright, loving, unselfish Madge! How bravely she bore her own heavy burden of sorrow, while bending all her energies to lighten ours! And none of us saw how the prolonged strain was breaking her down; none of us took so much as a thought for her who never seemed to have one to spare for herself. Day by day she faded before our eyes, and we were too blind to see it until, alas! it was too late.

It was not until Nellie was so far recovered that Sir George had fixed our return to England for the end of the following week that I found leisure to notice Madge's altered looks, and even then I thought she only needed rest and change from the long confinement to house and garden. A little fresher air would soon restore her appetite and bring back the colour to her cheeks, and I insisted on her joining her father and Nellie in the daily drives they now began to take.

One afternoon it chanced that I was her only companion. We had been into M. for some commissions, and were returning. As we approached the well-known curve in the road, I was passing it with averted head, as ever since that second vision, when Madge touched me on the arm.

"Look, Aunt Jennie," she said quietly.

Even before I turned I knew what sight would meet my eyes—knew also from her tone, quiet as it was, that to her also had the vision been sent.

Hand clasped in hand, in perfect silence, together we watched the long, dark line file out from the castle door and wind its noiseless way along the road beneath. Then, as the last figures disappeared from our view, Madge turned to me, no terror, but a wonderful radiance in her eyes.

"That is for the last time," she said. "Soon, very soon, the Golden Gates will open for me now."

"Madge! Madge!" I cried, "what do you mean?"

"I have seen it twice before," she answered, in just the same quiet tone, "and I shall not see it again. The time is very near when I shall join our dear ones who have gone before."

"Why should you take it to yourself?" I cried. "I, too, have seen it twice; the warning is for me, not you."

She shook her head.

"No, no, dear auntie; not for you, but for your little Madge is the warning sent. And do not grieve that it is so. Do not let your thoughts dwell on that gloomy procession. Before those dark doors close on my dead body, my spirit will have passed through the Gates of Light above, and will be already rejoicing in the Glory within."

"Oh, Madge, my darling," I sobbed in anguish; "I *cannot* let you go!"

But she soothed and hushed me as one would a child, telling me that I must not wish to keep her; that she was "so tired," so ready to go; until, insensibly, the influence of her own sweet composure stole over me, and I found myself talking with her as calmly as if this were no new topic between us.

"Your father—Nellie?" I asked her after a time. "Have you thought of them? How will they bear to lose you?"

"They will comfort each other," she said. "It is for this that I have been so very glad of the great change in Nellie. I had hoped to have seen dear old Daintree, and all the old places and people once again," she went on; "but it is not to be. I know now that I shall never leave Les Tourelles alive."

"So soon, so soon! It is impossible! Why, Madge," I cried, desperately, "you are not even *ill*!"

"Am I not?" she said, with her gentle smile, turning her sweet face full upon me.

Ah! why had I not sooner noticed its wasted outlines? How blind, how cruelly, selfishly blind I had been! And now, conviction striking sharp and sure to my heart, I burst afresh into an agony of grief and remorse.

But Madge led me to my room, and there again caressed, soothed, she almost awed me into tranquillity, and forced me at last to join the others with at least the semblance of composure. All that evening she was the life, as usual, of our little circle; winning even her widowed father to cheerfulness by her pretty, playful ways, and bright, though subdued, gaiety.

But it was the last time she ever came among us. On going to her room that night she was seized with a fit of coughing, in which she broke a blood-vessel. All that human skill could do for her was done, but it was of no avail. The fiat had gone forth.

To the last she kept her gentle gaiety and her tender thoughtfulness for others, but there was no clinging to life, no regret at being so early called away. Her room looked westward, and every evening she was laid on a couch in the window to watch the setting sun.

On the last evening she was laid there as usual. We knew that the end was close at hand, and were all gathered round her. The sun was setting behind a mass of purple and rose-coloured clouds, touching them as it sank with a brighter and still brighter radiance. At last the whole western sky glowed like a sheet of molten gold.

Its glory seemed to be reflected in the face of the dying girl; she raised herself on her pillow, and stretching her hands towards it: "The Golden Gates! the Golden Gates!" she cried; and without a struggle, without a sigh, her gentle spirit took its flight to Eternity.

ALEXANDRE DUMAS.

"POPULAR, but not known," was said of Alexandre Dumas, in the days when a new play or a new novel from his prolific pen was greeted, not only in France, but all over Europe, with rapturous enthusiasm.

The popularity of the author of "Monte Cristo," and the "Three Musketeers" was indisputable.

No amount of adverse criticism could stand against his vivid narrations of splendid deeds, superhuman sacrifices, audacious crimes—scenes of love, gaiety and adventure, strung together with an inexhaustible fertility of invention, and that spontaneous gaiety of heart which is so rare and so refreshing.

But, still, few writers have suffered more public and private slander and misrepresentation, or been so much underrated—so little known.

In England, although his stirring romances were read with avidity, he met with an ignorant moral condemnation, his works being classed with those of Eugène Sue, besides being rather illogically stigmatised "as for the most part worthless, and for the most part not his own."

It was also said of him that he lived only for amusement—to amuse others and to amuse himself—which was, perhaps, the truest thing, and the secret of his being able to pass the time for you as few other novelists will.

Thackeray, at least, appreciated him. "I think," he says, "of the prodigal banquet to which this Lucullus of a man has invited me! Where does he find the money for these prodigious feasts?"

And again, in the "Peal of Bells," he writes still more enthusiastically: "Of your heroic heroes, I think our friend Athos, Count de la Fère, is my favourite. I have read of him from sunrise to sunset with the utmost contentment of mind. He has passed through how many volumes? Forty? Fifty? I wish, for my part, there were a hundred more, and would never tire of him rescuing prisoners, finishing ruffians, and running scoundrels through the midriff with his most graceful rapier! Ah, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis! you are a most magnificent trio!"

His detractors in France accused him of being a literary manufacturer, and of employing that sort of collaboration which is not considered creditable; but this was nothing more than the established fashion of the day, and, whatever assistants he may have called in to paint the backgrounds, the hand of the master was never to be mistaken.

"Why will you not collaborer with me instead of Magnet?" he was heard to ask of Dumas fils. "I assure you it is not difficult,

and would bring you in forty or fifty thousand francs a year. You would only have to raise objections—to oppose me in the subjects I submitted to you, or to furnish me with rudiments of ideas which I could develop at leisure.”

The usual style of collaboration was this. The plot was arranged in common. The collaborateur brought a sketch of the work to the master, who altered it at his pleasure, and wrote it all over again; from one badly written volume, making, perhaps, two or three.

“Le Chevalier d’Harmanthal” was originally a novelette in sixty pages; but from an anecdote Dumas would make a novel; from a novel a romance; from a romance a drama; and, far from owing much to his assistants, it is unknown the number of writers whose name is given to books of which he himself wrote more than a third.

He had no literary jealousy, and it was a pleasure to him to find out what were the faults of a manuscript, and to correct and complete it. Thus he would often attribute more ability to a young author than he really possessed.

“I can’t think what is wanting to make so-and-so a man of talent,” he would say.

“Possibly it is the talent he wants,” it was suggested.

“Tiens! that’s true! I never thought of it.”

Especially in the series entitled “*Memoires d’un Médecin*,” he is accused of working up a good deal of borrowed material and of using a tolerably stout canvas of history into which to weave individual character and a few unreal incidents. If this be plagiarism, then every historical novel-writer must be called a plagiarist.

In the “*Chevalier de Maison Rouge*,” and others of the series, we have all the horrors of the French revolution before us; but what record—what *memoires pour servir* could give us the living picture of Marie Antoinette in all her strength and weakness, her pride and passion—of the indolent but kingly Louis—and their chivalrous adherents? Could Brantôme or Tallemant des Réaux have ever enchained our sympathies through fourteen volumes for the silent sufferings of the Comtesse de Charny, martyr to love and loyalty?—to the strange interventions of the mysterious Balsamo—the devotion of the Chevalier de Maison Rouge?

Great historical events are said to be bad subjects unless the interest be connected with wholly fictitious personages, and if this be the case, Dumas has surmounted the difficulty, and has drawn all his characters, whether real or imaginary, with equal force. We believe in them as we do in the events themselves. In his rare scenes of tragic passion he is excelled by very few; the reticent dignity of the classic school still clung to him, perhaps unconsciously, and however agonising may be the scene, it is narrated simply, uninterrupted by tedious analysis of feeling or tainted by the violence of melodrama. He was a lover of his own writings, and was often heard roaring with laughter as he wrote.

A short time before his death he was found reading "Les Trois Mousquetaires," and was asked what he thought of it. "Very good, very good indeed," he replied. A few days later "Monte Cristo" was in his hands, and the same question was put to him.

"Bah!" he exclaimed, "not to be compared to 'Les Mousquetaires.'"

It was as a play-writer that Dumas first made his mark. He was the avant-coureur of the Romantic School, and even in "Christine," his first drama, which was intended to be perfectly classic, the author's tendencies were sufficiently manifest.

At the close of the first reading of the play at the Théâtre Français, there was a dead silence, and the members of the committee looked at each other. Dumas was informed that the necessary deliberations could not be carried on in the presence of the author; he therefore withdrew. Presently Firmin, the successor of Talma, came to him and said: "The fact is, the committee finds itself in a position of the greatest embarrassment."

"And why?" asked Dumas.

"Because we cannot tell if the piece is classic or romantic."

"But that is only a question of words! Is it good or bad?"

"Ah," said Firmin, "that is what we don't know either."

"Christine," however, was to be produced, but owing to objections—disagreements—quarrels, and especially the depreciation of Made-moiselle Mars, it fell through, and was finally played at the Odéon.

His next drama, "Henri Trois et sa Cour:" compiled, it was said, from two historical fragments, and the scene in Walter Scott's "Abbot," where Murray makes Marie Stuart sign her abdication, was written in two months and played at the Théâtre Français.

"But before we came to that," says Dumas himself, "what rages—what despairs! what gnashing of teeth! Oh, Théâtre Français! Circle forgotten by Dante in his 'Inferno!'"

Dumas fils tells a good story of his father's clear-sightedness as to the signs of public favour and his readiness to adapt himself to public taste.

Whilst a theatrical version of "Les Mousquetaires" was being rehearsed at the Ambigu, the helmet of one of the firemen was seen stationary over the screen which shut off a part of the stage during the first acts. At the beginning of the last it disappeared.

As soon as he could get away Dumas rushed after the fireman and asked him why he had not remained to the end.

"Because it did not amuse me," was the reply.

Dumas went back, tore off his coat, waistcoat and cravat, as was his wont when going to work, called for the last act and tore it into shreds.

"*It didn't amuse the Pompier!*" he exclaimed.

Dumas wrote rapidly, but before putting pen to paper he had given infinite study to his work. He describes himself as lying

silent for days on the deck of a yacht imagining and thinking out the plot of a story. It was only after he had carefully arranged everything that he began to write, maintaining that the execution of a novel was a thing of minor importance. The conception—the progression—the rendering idea—this was the difficulty; all the rest would follow, as a matter of course—quite mechanical penwork.

This assertion having been disputed, he undertook to write the first volume of the "*Chevalier de Maison Rouge*" (after having well matured the plot) in sixty-two hours, including sufficient time for food and sleep. The volume was to contain seventy-five pages—forty-five lines in each page, and these were written in less than the time specified.

Another story is told of him: that being tired with half a day's shooting he went back to the farmhouse whence the party had started, and was found, on their return, stretched out before the kitchen fire.

"Have you been asleep all this time?" he was asked.

"By no means—there was such an abominable noise of cows and sheep, I couldn't close an eye."

"You have been doing nothing, then?"

"Yes. I have just finished composing a play in one act."

It has been said that he was indifferent to a regular, well-constructed plot, and that most of his novels are faulty in this respect. But let it be recollected that, fond as he was of history, the groundwork was almost always ready to his hand with sufficient incidents for the action of his characters.

In his dialogue lies the chief secret of his excellence, and he used to say that like Goethe, it was from his works that he derived "*l'art de confabuler*." He is no analyst, and has been called the least quotable of authors.

There was one thing he considered essential: he could never carry out a play or a romance unless he had seen the localities where the events took place.

He must himself have visited the scene of action. He went to Fontainebleau to write "*Christine*"—to Blois for "*Henri III.*"—to Boulogne for "*Les Trois Mousquetaires*."

"*Charles VII. et ses grands Vassaux*" was played at the Odéon, but without success, although it is a grand reading play, and this confirmed him in his enthusiasm for Victor Hugo, whose command of versification he was always contrasting with his own mediocrity. Full as he was himself of imagination and feeling, of *le feu sacré*, a rhyme came to him with difficulty.

"I would give ten years of my life to be able to write such verses," he exclaimed on reading "*Marion Delorme*." Being present at a first reading of the play, which took place at the house of Baron Taylor, the then director of the *Théâtre Français*, he was asked when the first act came to an end, what he thought of it.

"There is not a fault to find," he replied, "unless it might be in the mania that Victor Hugo has of making his personages enter through the window instead of the door."

When the reading was finished, Taylor enquired his candid opinion of the play, and he answered without hesitation: "Victor has reached his highest point."

"Why do you say so?"

"Because in 'Marion Delorme' are all the qualities of mature genius, and not one of the faults of youth. Progress is impossible when one begins by a perfect thing or one as near perfection as possible."

It was on leaving the house that a fanatic of the Romantic band exclaimed, on looking at the playbill for the evening: "*Les malheureux ! et ils vont jouer Britannicus !*"

To the great regret of Dumas the first representation of "Marion Delorme" took place without him, and the editor of the "*Journal des Débats*" said, intending to console him: "You did not lose much—it was not a success."

"Not lose much? Not a success?"

"Oh, yes—but it was received coldly, and no money."

"Coldly! no money? But," cried Dumas, "the poetry?"

"Feeble; much feebler than 'Hernani.'"

"Feeble? A piece in which there are such verses as these?" And then he repeated the whole scene in the first act between Marion and Didier.

"You know all that by heart?" exclaimed the editor.

"Naturally—I think it one of the finest things in the world."

"Well, that is wonderful! You to praise Victor Hugo!"

"Why not? I love and admire him."

"A confrère!" ejaculated the critic, in genuine astonishment.

Speaking of a poet who had fallen out of the ranks, Dumas said: "Why, in the career that we began together has he succeeded less well than I have? It is incomprehensible. He had quite as much genius as I have, and wrote incomparably better verses."

His contemporaries were not his equals in generosity. Victor Hugo treated him with coldness; some say with secret hostility; but Dumas would have eulogised his worst enemy rather than have kept silence when eulogy was due.

It was the same with Alfred de Musset, who refused all his offers of friendship. "He is a thicket of thorns," Dumas used to say, "and repays a caress with a scratch; since he will not have me for a friend, and since I will not hate him, I have a curious sort of feeling towards him. *I regret him.*"

Dumas made three or four million francs with his pen, but he was always in pecuniary difficulties. He neither gambled nor indulged in any excessive extravagance, but, over-prodigious and wholly careless, he was robbed on all sides.

His son relates that coming in one day and finding six hundred and fifty francs on the table, he asked his father to let him have fifty, who replied :

"Try to leave me a hundred if you can."

"A hundred francs ? Why, I only asked you for fifty."

"O, I beg your pardon. I thought you said six hundred."

One of the most curious things about Dumas was his extraordinary technical knowledge. He speaks securely and familiarly of the manners of all ages and countries. He employs the right terms in all circumstances, and in arms and dress, in duelling and fashion, is equally at home ; but with all this learning and observation he remained a boy to the end of his life. Rash, reckless, wholly unsuspicious, enthusiastic, genial, no truer word was said of him than was said to his face by Marie Duplessis when the father and son were being mentioned together. "Oui, Alexandre est Dumas fils, mais vous n'êtes pas Dumas père ; vous ne le serez jamais."

C. E. MEETKERKE.



"TIMES GO BY TURNS."—SOUTHWELL.

I SIT far from home, 'neath a roof had for hire,
Rain thick on my windows, the ghost of a fire ;
The stormy sea moaning the wrecks it will cast
On the rocks, ere the fate of its passions be past ;
Sad tidings—the last of the last that I love—
And a stranger's voice sings in the chamber above !

Lord, is this Thy world that I blessed long ago
In the old country home where the cedar sweeps low,
Where the rain seems to fall but to nourish the field,
And the light glowed in gay through our family shield ?
And there were so many to love that one dared
Sometimes to wonder who best might be spared ?

There came in procession, sin, sorrow and care,
And the cedar is felled, and the house stands bare.
Oh, my sisters ! happier was she who died
Than our beauty, who married for wealth and pride—
And so I sit in this lonely gloom,
And the stranger sings in the upper room !

There was something one said 'neath that old cedar tree
Which made it the crown of God's world for me.
And oh, I am certain he meant it then—
But women are fonder and weaker than men ;
For his love faded—and so did I !—
Why need that girl keep singing? Why ?

Less bitter the loneliness and the rain,
The divining fire and the moaning sea,
Than the song of a happiness nought to me—
Joy looked on outside shows so like Pain !

I remember once on a Christmas night,
When far on the snow glowed our festive light,
In the midst of our frolic and fun, there came
A face to our window: 'twas wild with shame
And sorrow and want, and in black despair
The wanderer cursed what she could not share !

Then it cut to the core of my heart to see
Life has other parts beside mirth and glee.
Her look struck my joy with so sharp a pain
That I could not join in our dance again ;
But I stole to the door, and I gave her food ;
And she dropped her cursing and called me good.
(I might pass her now, with indifferent mind,
Thinking, "Life has troubles of various kind.")

The very next year on the Christmas night
Over our snow glowed no festive light :
The dead was with us, but that woman passed
With her sailor husband safe home at last !
And I thought that her joy had shone more fair
Had her woe blessed gladness it could not share.

'Tis a young, sweet voice in the upper room,
Its sweetness wasted on me and gloom :
(I once sang sweetly—one told me so—
More than twenty long years ago !)
There are shadows behind and shadows before.
Twenty years hence, will this song be o'er ?

Ah, surely by then I shall be away,
From the lonely room and the dying day,
From the roaring sea and the divining fire,
At rest in a Home not had for hire.

So we take our turns. And God knows His plan—
Let the lassie sing as long as she can !

ISABELLA FVIE MAYO.

KITTY MACRANE.

I AM companion to Mrs. Malleson, and have been so ever since Dick died, and that was twenty years ago when I was young and happy, and life was bright and the world seemed beautiful.

I don't fancy Mrs. Malleson needed a companion much ; she was not more than thirty years old then, and had not lost her husband. But you see she had been fond of Dick, and when I was left desolate she pretended that a companion was necessary to her happiness, and so I have been with her ever since.

She did not let me guess that it was for my sake ; that would have been quite unlike her ; and it is only since I have become a real necessity to her that she has confessed why she brought me home then. She has been so good to me—oh, so good ! and my life is quite happy now, which I thought it could never be again when I lost Dick.

Mr. Malleson died many years ago, and Arthur now manages the estate, and his mother, and all of us. Arthur was always masterful, even when I remember him first, a little boy in frocks. But he is tender, too, and considerate, and we rather enjoy being managed by him. Arthur is a clever man and is doing great things as member for the county ; but he has his prejudices and some of them are very deeply-rooted. He has a suspicious dislike of lawyers and a hatred of Ireland. This, as I often tell him, is a sign of great narrowness somewhere, but there are no other signs of it ; to individuals he is most tolerant, and he doesn't often meet lawyers or Irishmen.

We live at Kenmore chiefly because Mrs. Malleson is fond of the country ; but sometimes the house in town is opened and we go up for part of the session. Arthur is independent of the house in Berkeley Square ; he always has his chambers where he occasionally stays during the season. We are not more than fifty miles from London, so even while Parliament is sitting, we see a great deal of him.

It was at Kenmore that the events I am about to relate took place ; the events which have so altered Arthur's life. I was in the morning-room, I remember, arranging the flowers for the drawing-room, when Mrs. Malleson came in with an open letter in her hand. She sank down wearily into a chair, and said : " Come here, Mary, and advise me ; I am at my wit's end."

" What is it ? " I asked, kneeling down beside her and taking her hand.

" Oh, it's Arthur ! " she said indignantly. " He is most unreasonable, most unkind ! Is it my fault that the child's guardian is dead ? "

" What child ? what guardian ? " I asked, bewildered.

"Why, my husband's Irish cousin, Kathleen Macrane ; that child whose father died some years ago—don't you remember ?"

"And her guardian is now dead ?" I said slowly.

"Yes ; he died suddenly last week. We are the only relatives she has in the world. Cousins seven or eight times removed, I believe ; but still, however distant the relationship may be, we must have her here. It is only right and proper."

"Yes," I said, thoughtfully. "And Arthur does not see it in that light ?"

"Oh, Arthur is quite absurd about it !" Mrs. Malleson said impatiently. "He says, 'Send her to school ; Newnham ; *anywhere* ; but pray don't have her here' !"

"How old is she ?"

"About eighteen or nineteen, I think. Certainly too old for school ; and I cannot send her off to Newnham without consulting herself."

"Why no, certainly. I suppose she will be quite dependent on you, too ?"

"No ; she has about two hundred pounds a year, I think ; I wish that were the difficulty. Those Irish members in the House have made Arthur quite rampant ; he cannot believe that any right-minded person can have lived, much less been born, in Ireland. But he *must* submit to have ——"

Arthur interrupted the words. He came into the room with the look on his face which we all knew to mean "My mind is made up."

"Mother," he began, "I was wrong just now in what I said ; perhaps selfish. I was considering myself and my own feelings alone, not the other side. Of course it is a responsibility we cannot well avoid ; she must come here ; we are her natural protectors, I suppose, now : and however disagreeable it may be to have a wild Irish girl rushing all over the place, it is our obvious duty to submit."

Mrs. Malleson heaved a sigh of relief. But she saw what it had cost Arthur to concede this.

"And now, how is she to come here ?" he went on ; "we had better get it over at once ; delay won't improve matters."

"Don't you think you might fetch her, Arthur ?" suggested his mother hesitatingly.

"Impossible !" flashed Arthur. "I must be attending to my duties in London."

"Let me go," I spoke quickly. "I am an excellent traveller, and a better chaperon for a young lady than Arthur is."

"If you would not mind, Mary," said Mrs. Malleson. "I would go myself—but, with this cold hanging about me ——"

"You must not think of it," I interrupted. "I shall like it of all things ; and I will try to make the poor girl feel a little at home before she comes here. It is quite a charming plan, and I shall not mind the sea passage there or back."

"It is very good of you, Mrs. Lister," said Arthur affectionately. "But there shall be no sea passage for you: we can arrange for her to be brought to Liverpool under proper escort."

A few days later I was at a Liverpool hotel; our trusty old butler, John, in attendance on me. The young traveller, then on the sea, was expected to land that afternoon. I must confess that I felt slightly nervous as I waited in the little private sitting-room. Suppose she should turn out to be something too wild! Yet, poor child, she might be in sorrow; no doubt she had just had a painful parting with her home and country—let me give her the best welcome in my power. I poked the fire and put on coals, and pulled the ugly old arm-chair close to the hearth, and then I rang the bell for John, and sent him to buy some flowers; any that he could find on this chilly March day. John went to the docks in the afternoon, and I waited. It was about five o'clock when he returned in the cab.

"The young lady has come, ma'am," he said, appearing in the sitting-room. And I saw in the doorway a girl with a look of shyness and yet of courage in her eyes.

"My dear, Mrs. Malleson was suffering from cold and could not come to meet you herself," I said, holding out my hands; "but I hope you will not miss her."

"I shall be very ungrateful if I do," she replied; and then I kissed her, she looked so sweet and lovable.

"Now come to your room and take off your things," I said; "you must be tired out. We will have tea when we come back; I thought high tea would be nicer than dinner after your voyage."

"Ever so much nicer," she returned. "I am not accustomed to late dinners, you know; at school we dined at two o'clock."

"But since you left school, my dear, at your guardian's?"

"I have never lived at my guardian's. Did you not know? I have always been at school, holidays and all. Mr. Ferris didn't like girls; I only saw him once a year."

"Your life has been a little lonely," I said gently, in answer to her look and tone.

"Oh, it has," she cried. "The girls were nice, but they seemed to leave so soon—the ones I cared for. That was the sadness of it; so many partings."

The voice and eyes were so wistful that I felt quite husky, and could only look at her in silence. "This is Arthur's wild Irish girl," I thought with inward amusement. "She doesn't seem capable of a harmless jig, poor child; much less of tearing about to turn the place upside down, or of ranting forth on the woes of her injured fatherland."

Not at all did I understand her at this time, or indeed for weeks afterwards. Hers was a complex nature, and many-sided. I only saw the wistful longing for affection, the gentleness, the sweetness of her character, and drew my conclusions accordingly. I was entirely

perplexed later when I saw her cold, wilful, tantalising and altogether incomprehensible. And the cause of all that happened was mine; all the misery and pain, all the bitterness, all the miserable misunderstanding which ensued was my fault.

"You will soon only long for change," I said cheerfully; "at Kenmore we lead a very peaceful, calm life. Mr. Malleeson goes often to London, it is true, but we always have his return to look forward to. The only fear is that a young girl like you will find it dull."

"I don't think that is likely," she said smiling. "School is not exactly an exciting place, yet I found it very interesting."

We went back to the little sitting-room then and had tea. The bare hotel room looked more home-like with the young girl in it, and after the tea-things had been removed and I was sitting in the old armchair, with Kitty curled up on the hearthrug at my feet, we felt quite happy. I could not help watching the child, she made such a pretty picture in the firelight. Hers was a small, flower-like face, set in a frame of dusky brown hair, the features were delicately cut and small, the mouth and chin more firmly chiselled than is usual with girls of her age. Her eyes were beautiful—large, clear, grey eyes, and capable, as I afterwards found, of very varying expressions. At present they were full of a wide-awake interest in what I was telling her of her future home.

"It is a charming old place, my dear," I said, in answer to her eager questions. "Yes, there are woods at no great distance, and a river beyond the village. You will miss your hills, I am afraid; we are sadly flat, but we get finer sunsets for that very reason."

"And the people, Mrs. Lister; what are they like?"

"You will love Mrs. Malleeson; everyone does. The people about are very pleasant, but we are a little independent of them; no one lives very near, so we have to be satisfied with ourselves, and we find it fairly easy."

"And Mr. Malleeson, my very, *very* far-removed cousin? You don't say anything about him," she said, looking up at me with her great questioning eyes.

"Oh, yes, to be sure," I answered, trying to speak with great ease, and failing signally. "Arthur is very nice; exceedingly nice; but he is in Parliament, you know, and often away in London."

"Yes, and you spoke of always looking forward to his return," she said, a little puzzled. "I don't understand, is he not *quite* nice?"

"Oh, yes, *indeed*!" I returned all too eagerly. "He is a dear fellow, and we should be terribly lost without him. He rules us all, you must know, with a rod of iron, but he is so good and wise and we need it, don't you see?"

"I am afraid I *don't* see," she said quietly. Then with frankness; "I don't think he *is* quite nice; what you say makes me think him overbearing and interfering."

"My dear," I cried in alarm and distress; "you have quite a wrong idea of him, indeed, *indeed* you have! All I meant was that Arthur is strong and determined; not a bit more so than is becoming in a man."

"Yes?" she said questioningly. "And how is he strong?"

"Oh, in every way," I answered quickly. "He has strong likes and dislikes; strong inclinations to certain people and strong prejudices against others."

"I see," she interrupted, looking thoughtfully into the fire. "He is narrow and bigoted, but with strong affections for the few of whom he approves. *I* shall hate *him*, and *he* will take a lasting prejudice against *me*. How pleasant!"

"My dear," laying my hand on her shoulder, "you quite misunderstand me. Arthur is not at all narrow-minded; he is not arrogant, or conceited, or self-assuming, as you seem to think: he is one of the gentlest, noblest of men. Why, he behaved splendidly about you, in spite of his prejudice."

"About me?" said Kitty, looking up with wide-open, astonished eyes.

"Yes," I went on, too anxious to clear Arthur, to think of the effect of my words. "He has an antipathy to Irish people, and when Mrs. Malleeson proposed that you should come to Kenmore, he opposed the plan, saying he would not have a wild Irish girl running loose all over the place. But after a few minutes' reflection, he recalled all he had said, repented of it, and came back to confess it. 'Mother, I have been wrong,' said he; 'we are her only protectors, and it would not be right to evade the responsibility duty has laid on us; she must come here, of course.' Don't you think it was noble of him to acknowledge that; he a man, and so proud too?"

"Oh, most noble!" she answered in a curious tone. "His sense of duty must be strong."

"It is," I said readily. "And you will soon overcome his prejudices, my dear; nothing could be more unlike his idea of an Irish girl than you."

"Shall I?" she said in the same tone, with an ambiguous smile. "Time will show."

"And I hope you have a clearer idea of Arthur's character now, after all this explanation?"

"Oh, I have a very clear idea of him, indeed, thank you, Mrs. Lister. I feel as if I had known him for years. But I am feeling rather tired; I think I had better say good-night," added the girl.

She looked terribly white and weary, and there was a stricken look in the wistful eyes I had not specially observed.

"My dear, you are quite worn out," I said tenderly. "There, run away to bed, and I will come in and put out your candle and say 'Good-night,' presently."

When I went to her room the light was out, but she was still

awake. As I leant to kiss her she put her arms up round my neck, and I felt that she had been crying.

"Dear, you are feeling home-sick?" I whispered.

"Oh, the world *is* so hard," she wailed; "and there is so little love in it! But *you* are kind; you are so good to me."

The next day we were in the drawing-room at home, waiting for dinner. Kitty was seated in a low basket chair near the hearth, gazing silently into the fire, while Arthur, leaning back against the mantelpiece, had his brown eyes earnestly fixed on her face. I had felt nervous as to the effect she would make on him to-night, for when I met her on the stairs, I saw that her pretty yellowish-pink dress was made in the æsthetic fashion which Arthur so dislikes. He was very pleasant, however, and though he looked at her a good deal, there was no open disapproval in the glance. He had evidently made up his mind to endure the inevitable with a good grace, and no one who was not aware of his dislike to all Irish people, and all æstheticism, would have imagined for a moment that he was not quite happy in the presence of this girl.

"You feel tired with your journey, I am afraid?" he said to her presently.

"Thank you, no; I am quite rested," she replied without looking up.

"You are accustomed to travelling, perhaps?"

"No, I have never been more than fifty miles from Dublin before," she answered, with her eyes still fixed on the fire.

"Really? We must take you about a little, then," he said pleasantly, "and show you some of our sights."

She made no answer to this, nor did she seem in any way interested.

"Come, Arthur, don't worry the child with questions," said Mrs. Malleeson; "she is tired out. One cannot cross that wretched water, and travel half a day in addition, without being knocked up."

"Indeed, I am not tired scarcely at all," said Kitty, looking up for the first time, and smiling sweetly across at Mrs. Malleeson.

"Ah, what an Irish remark!" laughed the other.

"Oh, you will soon find that I am completely Irish," she said carelessly. "Not only in my words and ways, but in my feelings and opinions too."

"Dear me! Isn't dinner very late to-night?" I hastily interposed.

The gong sounded at that moment, to our great relief, and we hoped that Kitty would not make any more dangerous remarks likely to irritate Arthur. We found her very bright and amusing at table, and tenderly deferential and sweet whenever she spoke to Mrs. Malleeson or myself; but she never addressed Arthur willingly, and in answer to his questions gave the most concise and chilly replies. He looked a little angry once or twice at her marked coldness, but

soon made fresh advances of friendliness, for no one could be angry with Kitty for long. He returned with us to the drawing-room after dinner, and was eager in seconding his mother's petition, that Kitty should sing to us. She took no notice of him at all, but answered Mrs. Malleeson very readily.

"I will sing with pleasure if you like to hear," she said simply. "I know only a few old-fashioned songs, and I have never been taught, but I like to sing to myself."

Her "few old-fashioned songs" were the sweetest I had ever heard, and her voice the most touching and tender. It thrilled through our hearts as she sang, and brought tears to our eyes. Who would have thought that the girl who had made us laugh so readily at dinner, who spoke so simply and unaffectedly about herself, was capable of expressing all the passionate longing, and pain, and hopelessness which she threw into her voice? There was something pathetic in feeling that one so young and bright, should yet have the power of realising the misery of which life is possible.

"My dear," said Mrs. Malleeson, when Kitty would sing no longer, "where did you learn to sing like that? It is very, very beautiful, but it hurts me to hear you; your life must have been so sad."

"Oh, no," she answered gently, looking gratefully at Mrs. Malleeson. "One can *imagine* what it must be to be forsaken and heart-broken—don't you think so? It is much easier than to put oneself in the place of happy people. I am never able to sing *happy* songs."

"I shall make it my aim to find in London to-morrow some happy song which you *will* be able to sing," said Arthur, with a determined look in his eyes.

"Please don't," she answered coldly. "I will try to get some happy songs if it pains you to hear sad ones," she added to Mrs. Malleeson.

"It only pains me if it implies sorrow of your own, my dear," spoke the elder lady.

"Then, please, I'll stick to my old ballads," said Kitty.

II.

"How foolish of her!" said Arthur in a vexed tone, as he stood gazing from the window with his hands in his pockets. "She will get a racking head-ache out there in this heat."

"What is it?" I asked, joining him at the window.

"Look!" he said, nodding his head in the direction of the terrace outside.

There, leaning over one of the surrounding flower-beds, was a slim, white-robed figure, bare-headed in the glaring noonday sun.

For the year had gone on to summertime; and the months had brought a change in the heart of Arthur Malleeson. He loved Kitty Macrane.

"Foolish girl!" I said, looking at her as she bent there. "How it is that she neither tans nor freckles I cannot imagine, for she never puts on her hat if she can help it. I will take it to her; she'll get a sunstroke if she doesn't mind."

"No, don't trouble," said Arthur lazily. "I was just going out; I can take her the hat, and say you sent it."

I stayed at the window to see the result of his errand. Presently he appeared on the terrace with Kitty's shady garden hat in his hand. "It is much too sunny for you to be out with nothing on your head," he said, presenting the hat.

"Thank you, I don't want it," said Kitty frigidly. "If I had wished for a hat I should not have come out without one. Please take it back again."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," he answered, looking at her rather helplessly. "You are behaving like a silly child. You know you often get headaches these hot days."

"You must really allow me to dress as I please," she said, looking at him coldly. "You can, of course, meddle in the private concerns of your mother and Mrs. Lister, since they permit it, but I must decline your interference." And she turned her back on him and went on gathering her flowers.

He grew a little white, and bit his lip to keep down the passionate words that rose; then he spoke quietly and calmly: "Mrs. Lister sent me with your hat; she was afraid the sun would be bad for you. I suppose I must tell her that you——"

Kitty turned round hastily, a flush of shame on her face. "I beg your pardon," she said quickly, looking up at him with regretful eyes. "I ought not to have said that to you; it was very rude."

"And untrue," he added earnestly.

She hesitated, looking a little defiant; then she raised her eyes to his and said gently:

"Yes, and untrue. Do you forgive me now?"

"Why yes," he answered, smiling gladly. "That is the kindest thing you have ever said to me, that retraction. And now about the hat: what am I to do with it?"

"I will put it on, as Mrs. Lister sent it," she said gravely, taking it from him.

"And why not when I asked you to do so?" he went on, reproach in his tone.

"Because I did not choose," she answered promptly. "It is a mark of an Irishwoman, you know, to think her own way best."

"But why be so inconsistent? You are not following your own will now."

"Oh yes, I am. My will at present is to please Mrs. Lister."

"Will it ever be your will to please me, Kitty?" he said rather sadly.

"I expect it would be impossible, Mr. Malleeson."

“Not if you try. *Do* try: indeed it would not be difficult.”

“I don’t think I care to,” she responded coolly. “I do not think the game would be worth the candle.”

“Just as you please,” he rejoined proudly and bitterly. “Perhaps it amuses you to torture me? If so, your life here must be full of amusement, Kitty.”

“Mr. Malleson, I prefer to hear you call me by my surname.”

“And I prefer your Christian name; I like it better.”

“You are not privileged to address me by it.”

“No? I think I am. You call my mother aunt, and you know I am a cousin, though a distant one. Kitty is such a dear little name,” he added tenderly.

“It is only the people I love, who are allowed to call me Kitty,” she retorted, in a cutting tone. “If you wish to exercise your cousin’s privilege, call me ‘Paddy;’ that was the name the only person I ever hated gave me.”

“You are cruel, Miss Macrane,” he said, deeply hurt. “I am going in; I will not trouble you with my presence longer.”

“Thank you.” Presently she came in with the flowers and began to arrange them in the glasses, but with less interest than usual. I inquired what the matter was. She was not feeling happy, she answered. Somehow the world seemed out of joint. To me she looked as if oppressed with a sense of guilt.

“Kitty, have you and Arthur been quarrelling?”

“As if I should condescend to quarrel with him!” she rejoined, her face all in a blush. “I daresay he did not like some things I said.”

“You are very wrong and foolish, my dear.”

“I daresay I am. Indeed, I know I am. Of course I need not show myself *quite* so uncivil. I will put some flowers in his study Mrs. Lister; that will tell him I am sorry.”

She ran up to her room to bring down a most treasured vase that was there, and filled it daintily with her choicest flowers. “There! if that doesn’t soothe his ruffled feelings, I don’t know what will!” she said, as she critically eyed her work, and I wondered whether she was speaking in mockery.

His study was empty, and Kitty put her peace-offering down on his writing table. She had never been there at her leisure before, and she now looked round with pleased eyes at the prettily arranged room. Above the writing table hung a painting of Arthur’s father. Kitty was looking intently on this, tracing the likeness between father and son, when a voice at her side rose quietly.

“It is considered a good portrait.” And the girl started in surprise, and turned quickly to meet Arthur’s gaze.

“I—I beg your pardon,” she said; “I thought I was quite alone; I am very sorry; I will go at once.”

“Pray don’t let me drive you away,” he answered coldly. Then,

as his eyes fell on the flowers, "You meant them for me?" he cried, more gently. "That was good of you."

"Oh!" said Kitty, impulsively, "I am sorry for what I said just now; I did not mean it, really; it is only my nasty temper. And—and you may call me——"

"Kitty?" he whispered, his face lighting up. "May I really?"

"I was going to say *Kathleen*," she said timidly. "Perhaps when I get used to that I may not mind—the other."

"Well, I will try to be content with that at present. And it is very kind of you—thank you so much."

"Oh, not at all," returned Kitty, making her escape.

A few days after this Kitty became ill with the heat. In her usual reckless fashion she had stayed out in the blazing sun without anything on her head, and the result was a most intense headache. It was the more unfortunate since Mrs. Malleson and I were going out to dine at a distance, and Arthur was in London. But Kitty declared she should be quite happy alone; that solitude would be good for her, in order that she might for once meditate on the error of her ways. So we drove away soon after six o'clock.

Later, when Kitty had sent her dinner away nearly untouched, Arthur walked in. He explained that he had been able to "pair" for a week, and had come home for a short holiday.

"You are looking ill," he said tenderly. "What is it? How could they leave you alone like this?"

"Oh, they had to go to the dinner," replied Kitty. "They didn't want to, they are very careful of me; it is only a headache. I stayed out in the sun this morning: of course without a hat," she added, with a sly smile.

"But you get these headaches so often," he cried anxiously. "Don't you think you ought to have some advice, Kathleen?"

"Oh, no; please don't talk of that! I am perfectly well, and as happy as a grig, thank you."

"I should never dare to insist on anything with you, Kathleen. You have at least taught me how overbearing I am."

She looked at him in surprise for a moment, and then answered gravely. "Yes, I think you are; you are too masterful. But you are much less so than you were."

"I do try to be less so, indeed, Kathleen; but it is up-hill work, struggling against the habits of a life-time!"

He looked so humble, and was evidently so much in earnest, that Kitty felt touched. "It must be very difficult," she said in a sympathising tone. "I do not see how you could have helped becoming so, left as you were with only your mother to guide you, and she adoring you and giving up to you in everything. It has not been your fault."

"Kitty, I don't know you under this aspect at all," he said, looking into her eyes. "You have not given me one unkind word or look since I came in. Is it because of your headache?"

"No, I have been meditating," answered Kitty slowly. "You may look amazed if you like; I know it is an unprecedented thing in the annals of my life; and I have discovered that I have judged you very harshly, and perhaps wrongly. I wanted to tell you that I am sorry; *that* is no new thing I am afraid, but I mean to reform, and I hope that I shall not need to be for ever asking pardon for my injustice."

"Oh, Kitty!" he said passionately. "I deserve every harsh thought you may have had of me; every word you have said! Do not grieve or think that *you* have been wrong. Just give me a word of kindness now and then, and I will struggle to—be—quite different."

Kitty did not answer in words—perhaps her heart was too full; but she laid her hand in his. He bent his head and kissed it reverently.

Kitty told me all about it when I got home and went to her room to wish her good-night: she was always a sweet little maid to me, and confided all her secrets.

After this, life went on more smoothly at Kenmore; we had not the constant dread of quarrels which had hitherto marred our domestic peace. A great change had come over Arthur; indeed it had been coming before this. He never laid down the law as he had been accustomed to do, or disclaimed dictatorially against women's rights, æstheticism, Ireland, and the like. His opinions on these subjects may have remained unchanged, but if so, he had learnt to keep his views to himself.

Kitty, too, was not quite the same; her snubbing coldness to Arthur was a thing of the past; yet she was varying in her moods to him, and I used often to wonder at his patience with her; he, who had always had things arranged according to his own pleasure.

One evening we were all in the drawing-room after dinner, Mrs. Malleson and I sat playing chess at the end of the room; over her shoulder I could clearly see the two young people, who were nearer the fire—for Autumn weather was drawing on.

"Won't you sing something?" said Arthur. "You have not sung for days."

"If you like," said Kitty, going over to the piano. "What shall it be?"

"Robin Adair."

"Oh, that is so sentimental," she objected. "I am tired of those love-sick songs; I have no patience with people who go about confiding their woes to the general public!"

"Kitty, how unlike you!" he said, expostulately.

"Well, I haven't!" she continued. "I think it shows a great want of good taste; and I don't much believe in the reality of those love-raptures one reads about."

"Oh, well, if you are in this mood, I give you up. You are

perfectly incomprehensible to me sometimes. Pray had you the same ideas yesterday, when I found you in tears over 'James Lee's Wife?'"

"I never have the same ideas two minutes together," she said, flippantly. "Haven't you discovered that yet?"

"I see what you are driving at," said Arthur, a little sadly. "But it is no use, Kitty, nothing could make me believe you cynical; you may as well cease your efforts, I know you too well now ever to be shaken in my belief in you."

"If you have already formed you conclusions about me, of course nothing will alter them," said Kitty, resignedly. "I felt that I should like to correct them a little; that was all."

"Don't sing now, Kitty," he entreated, as she seated herself before the piano. "Don't spoil my evening by singing in this contrary mood."

"You need not listen," she said; "I won't sing very loud."

Arthur went back to his seat, and buried his face in a newspaper, completely turning his back on the piano. But very soon the paper was laid down, and he sat in rapt silence so as to catch every note that rose and fell on his ear. Kitty was singing "Soft and Low," that exquisite lullaby of Tennyson's. Her voice was almost a whisper in its tender, caressing tone; contradicting effectually, the hard, cynical speeches she had just made.

"There! that is sweeter than those love songs," she said, as she went and sat down opposite Arthur.

"Thank you, Kitty; thank you."

Kitty's varying moods must have been a trial to Arthur at this time; he could never be sure how to take her; she was gentle and kind one hour, flippant or cynical the next, but never just what he wished. He had been in love with her for a long time now; indeed, ever since he saw her first, many months ago; but he had never told her of his love: she knew how to prevent that. This uncertainty was preying on his health; he was paler and thinner than of old, and his spirits fluctuated according to Kitty's moods. At last I determined to speak, and said perhaps more than I had meant to say. Kitty was frightfully distressed; she had never realised how much Arthur suffered; had never noticed how ill and worn he was looking.

"I have been wilful and wicked," she said, with tears. "I thought—yes, I did—long ago, that—that he liked me; but I would not be kind to him because of what I had heard of him. He *was* cruel about me before I came, Mrs. Lister."

"My dear, it was only for a moment," I said. "He acknowledged his fault at once, and said that he had been cruel and selfish, and had not thought of how lonely and unprotected you must be. And he had not seen you then, Kitty."

"Well, I did think it unmanly to speak like that about a lonely, unhappy girl. I made up my mind that night at Liverpool never to

be nice to him. And since then I kept it up out of bravado; and, Mrs. Lister, it is all just my obstinate temper. Wicked, ungrateful girl that I have been!"

Kitty was in the library one afternoon, as it was growing dusk, curled up on the hearth-rug and reading by fire-light, as she loved to do. She heard the door open, and saw Arthur come in, but she did not move, hoping that he would not see her in the dim light of the room; but he at once caught sight of the little figure. She rose then, and seated herself more decorously in the arm-chair, while he moved up and stood leaning against the mantelpiece, looking down at her.

"What have you been reading?" he asked. "Browning again? You are fond of Browning."

"Yes; I have been reading 'Andrea del Sarto.' Is it not beautiful?"

"Very beautiful, but very sad."

"Yes; life *is* sad."

"Oh, no," said Arthur; "life is very sweet."

"I suppose life is very much what we make it," replied Kitty. "It is sad when we have been wicked, as *I* have been."

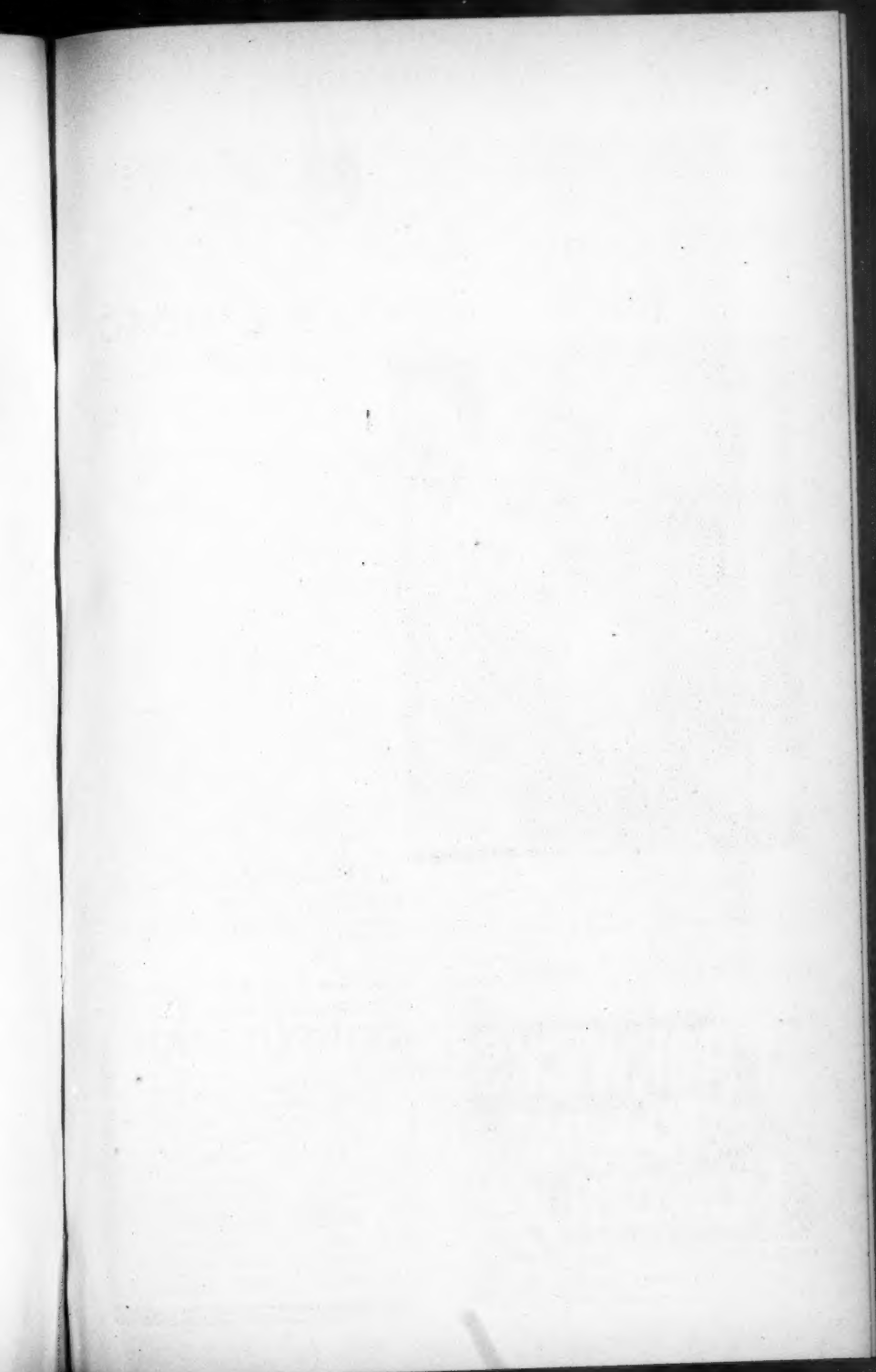
"You! Oh, no, no."

"Yes, I have," she insisted. "I have been wicked ever since I came here. I have had hard thoughts about you, and I have been wrong to you always. But I am sorry now; I am *very* sorry now. I wish I could show you how sorry."

"You can, if you like," said Arthur, passionately, as he drew to her side and took her hand. "You know how I love you, my darling! I have loved you ever since the first night you came. Only say you will love me sometime, Kitty; say you will *try* to love me!"

"There is no need to try," whispered Kitty, glancing at him with her great tender eyes. "I have always—*cared* for you, I think, Arthur—just a little, you know; and that was why I was so cruel, you see."







M. L. GOW.

SPARED.

Frontispiece.

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